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CONTRIBUTIONS TO RHETORICAL THEORY

EDITED BY FRED NEWTON SCOTT, PH.D.  
*Professor of Rhetoric in the University of Michigan*

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IX.

The Critical Principle of the Reconciliation of  
Opposites as Employed by Coleridge

By  
ALICE D. SNYDER

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ANN ARBOR  
1918

Monograph.



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## PREFATORY NOTE

When I began this study I intended to make a comparison of the ways in which the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites was used by the two critics, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas De Quincey. Later I decided to devote the whole paper to Coleridge's applications of the principle, since they proved to be many and copious. The comparative work has, however, influenced not a little my interpretation of the characteristic form given to the principle by Coleridge.

Although the angle from which I approach the subject is defined in the introductory section of the paper, I may guard against misunderstanding by saying once for all that I am not making an investigation of the sources of Coleridge's criticism, a field in which much excellent work has been done by others. In this study I have confined myself to Coleridge's own writings, drawing mainly upon the collection of note-book jottings entitled *Anima Poetae*, and the *Literary Remains*—especially the lectures on Shakespeare.

A. D. S.



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## INTRODUCTION

### I. STATEMENT OF THE POINT OF VIEW

Such an aesthetic principle as that of the Union or Reconciliation of Opposites is likely to be most highly valued in an age that habitually talks in terms of the great fundamental opposites or antitheses, with keen consciousness of the element of opposition,—that is, in a dualistic age. As Yrjö Hirn has indicated,<sup>1</sup> summarizing Bosanquet's theory, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century conception of art as that which reconciled or mediated between certain acknowledged opposites, was a most welcome conception to philosophers of the old dualistic school, "who had to struggle with what seemed to them an irreconcilable opposition between reason and the senses," and to the ethical observer caught in the meshes of the "narrow antagonism between body and spirit." To a less dualistic age this conception is of less significance. Quoting further from Hirn, with reference to the mediating aesthetic faculty or the judgment of taste: "In proportion . . . as general science has been able to do away with the old dualism of higher and lower faculties, the judgment of taste has necessarily lost importance. In the development of monistic philosophy and monistic morals we may thus see one important factor by the influence of which aesthetics has been ousted from its central position." Without concerning ourselves here with the general fate of aesthetics, we must at least agree that so much is being said, of recent years, about the relativity of opposition, criticism is so persistently nullifying all absolute lines of demarcation, that there is some tendency to relegate all dualistic categories to the past. Certainly the intellectual dualism that preceded the nineteenth century's evolutionary theory is now frequently considered as something useful in its day but once and for all outgrown, and a corresponding judgment is passed upon all the metaphysical "reveling in ideas of the absolute"<sup>2</sup> that marked the early attempts to reconcile the terms of the dualism.

This is doubtless as it should be: the particular form of theorizing about opposites and their reconciliation that prevailed in

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<sup>1</sup> The Origins of Art, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase is Höffding's.

the early nineteenth century can never exactly recur; dualism, if by the term is meant the dualistic theory of a past period, may well have departed forever. But dualism conceived in the larger sense, as a principle of thinking, has suffered no such fate. With reference to the larger meaning of dualism, and its necessary persistence in one form or another, I accept the interpretation given in Professor Dewey's essay, *The Significance of the Problem of Knowledge*, and that in Professor Lloyd's sociological study, *Conformity, Consistency, and Truth*. In explaining the inevitable persistence of dualism, Professor Dewey writes: "The distinctions which the philosophers raise, the oppositions which they erect, the weary treadmill which they pursue between sensation and thought, subject and object, mind and matter, are not invented *ad hoc*, but are simply the concise reports and condensed formulae of points of view and of practical conflicts having their source in the very nature of modern life, and which must be met and solved if modern life is to go on its way untroubled, with clear consciousness of what it is about. . . . More especially I suggest that the tendency for all points at issue to precipitate in the opposition of sensationalism and rationalism is due to the fact that sensation and reason stand for the two forces contending for mastery in social life: the radical and the conservative. The reason that the contest does not end, the reason for the necessity of the combination of the two in the resultant statement, is that both factors are necessary in action; one stands for stimulus, for initiative; the other for control, for direction."<sup>3</sup> Professor Dewey has here translated dualism from the terms of metaphysics into those of sociology and psychology, but the dualism is still there; it is a principle and a principle not only of thought but of life. Showing how, under evolutionism, dualism has come to be a "living principle" instead of a "given structure," Professor Lloyd writes: "The difference between mind and matter, subject and object, spiritual life and natural life, is now a difference that means, not the existence of two separate and mutually exclusive worlds or orders or substances, but the wealth, the inexhaustible life, the rich potentiality, even the creative activity of one." After showing that this creative activity means a living unity instead of the uniformity that went with the old dualistic notion of creation, he continues: "Evolution, as it is at last coming to be appraised, has thus given us a real universe, not merely a uniform one. With

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<sup>3</sup> Pp. 4-5.

uniformity went, as suggested already, special creation and the medieval dualism; with unity, the free unity of a real universe, goes an always creative life and, with regard to the fate of dualism under the newer view, this, even like the creation, has been wonderfully magnified or aggrandized, having become—can I count on being understood?—a living principle of duality, a function, instead of remaining in its quondam character of a single dual structure. Evolution has made creation general, and natural as general, and dualism functional, compounding both, one might almost say, to infinity, so that those who have seen in evolution only anti-creationism and only anti-dualism have certainly been seriously misled by some one, perhaps, as is not unthinkable, by the evolutionists themselves.”<sup>4</sup>

It is as a fundamental principle of life and thought, as vital to-day as it was a century ago, that I am regarding dualism in this study of the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites. And yet I am centering my attention on a writer who clearly belonged to the last century rather than to this, and to the very beginning of that century. There are two purposes which a study thus focused might well have, and these two purposes must be distinguished.

On the one hand, an attempt might be made to find in the earlier expressions of the principle certain direct suggestions of its later scientific significance. With due allowance for difference in point of view, we might seek between the lines or within the parentheses of former-day criticism, support for the conclusions of modern scientific analysis, and even some hints of positive contribution. Following such a method we should first ask in what sense, according to contemporary aesthetic theory, art may be said to “reconcile opposites.” We might analyze, with Miss Puffer,<sup>5</sup> the psychological effect of the structural oppositions found in the concrete work of art,—such oppositions as appear and are reconciled in spatial symmetry, plot conflict, and various forms of contrast. Or, considering the matter sociologically, we might ask in how far modern critics, following Tolstoi’s lead,<sup>6</sup> construe art as that transfer of feeling which finds its signifi-

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<sup>4</sup> *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, Vol. X, pp. 285-286.

<sup>5</sup> *The Psychology of Beauty*.

<sup>6</sup> *What is Art?*

cance in reconciling social oppositions,—obliterating class distinctions through the creation of a mutual, understanding sympathy. Or, to follow a different line of modern thought, we might treat the matter as Furry<sup>7</sup> has done, from the standpoint of epistemology, and investigate the general function of the aesthetic experience in reconciling eternally recurrent though ever-changing thought dualisms. And after some such investigation we might turn back to our earlier critics, hoping to find in their works passages which, when translated, would corroborate or even further develop our contemporary hypotheses.

On the other hand, the purpose of such a study might be to expound some expression of the principle primarily as a product of its own age. In this case we should keep to the historical method, assuming that the careful study of an idea as related to its own time may throw as much light on the significance of its later development as would a direct translation into modern terminology.

The historical method is the one that I have adopted in this study. I am not translating, but am studying Coleridge's own language, and asking what it means that he used just such language. I am not asking, primarily, how much truth of an absolute, scientific kind we can cull from out the mazes of his critical speculations, but rather, accepting all the mazes, I am studying his speculations in their own early nineteenth century form, and am asking what it means that Coleridge thought and talked about art and literature as he did.

Further, since I am assuming that the form of thought is related just as organically as the content to the vital interests of a period or an individual, my method is to some extent logical or formal. The *Reconciliation of Opposites* taken as a fundamental thought principle, appearing now in one form and now in another, has a formal history well worth investigating. In studying Coleridge's use of the principle I am not so much concerned about the exact content of his formulae, the terms of his antitheses, as might be expected. I am more interested in analyzing their logic,—in trying to get at the significance of antithesis as a general form of art definition, and in studying the different forms of opposition and reconciliation involved in Coleridge's critical concepts.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Aesthetic Experience.*

## 2. GENERAL DEFINITION OF THE PRINCIPLE

The Reconciliation of Opposites, as an aesthetic principle, can perhaps be best defined and its general logical implications best indicated by carefully distinguishing it from a certain superficially similar formula which, in English criticism, seems to have been its logical as well as its chronological forerunner. Long before the German philosophers and their English disciples began speculating on the reconciliation of opposites involved in the Absolute and in Art, even in the sixteenth century beginnings of English literary criticism, we find writers defining poetry in a way that strangely suggests this philosophic formula, namely, as a combination of Instruction and Delight. Gregory Smith gives typical examples of this formula in his discussion of the sixteenth century apologists; he writes as follows: "In their rough definitions of the purpose of Poetry the defenders are careful not to subordinate the *dulce* to the *utile*. The end of Poetry is, with Sidney, 'to teach and delight.' 'It is well known,' says Nash, 'that delight doth prick men forward to the attaining of knowledge, and that true things are rather admired if they be included in some witty fiction, like to pearls that delight more if they be deeper set in gold.' Webbe's plea, which he borrows from Horace, is generally accepted. 'The perfect perfection of poetry is this, to mingle delight with profit in such wise that a reader might by his reading be a partaker of both.'"<sup>8</sup>

There is certainly a similarity between this Instruction-Delight formula and the later definitions that make art the union of now one and now another pair of opposed elements. Yet logically the definitions are quite distinct and imply vastly different attitudes toward the object.<sup>9</sup> According to the earlier definition it was the virtue of poetry that it combined two admirable prop-

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabethan Critical Essays, Vol. I, p. xxv. Cf. Spingarn on Sidney's Defence: "In regard to the object, or function, of poetry, Sidney is at one with Scaliger. The aim of poetry is accomplished by teaching most delightfully a notable morality; or, in a word, by delightful instruction. Not instruction alone, or delight alone, as Horace had said, but instruction made delightful; and it is this dual function which serves not only as the end but as the very test of poetry." (Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, pp. 270-271.)

<sup>9</sup> For the analysis of the principle of antithesis that follows the writer is indebted to sundry articles and lectures by Professor A. H. Lloyd, especially the article entitled The Logic of Antithesis, Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods, Vol. VIII, pp. 281-289.



erties frequently sundered, sometimes loosely conceived as opposed. But Instruction and Delight were in no sense logical opposites—Poetry was not the logical reconciler of opposites. There was no real antithesis, no principle of opposition.

Nor should we expect to find real antithesis in these earlier definitions. The critics were altogether too much interested in one of the terms of the definition, Instruction, to use the form of antithesis, opposition and reconciliation. For in all antithesis there is balance, hence a feeling of indifference towards the terms of the antithesis. One term is as good as the other, and, in as far as they are conceived as real opposites, or the mutually exclusive terms of some universe of discourse, no considerable value is attached to either. For the fact that concepts of any sort are placed in antithesis means, logically, that the value of their traditional meanings as separate concepts is being superseded by some new undefined value that is vaguely felt to embody, hence reconcile, the two opposites; and through this new, larger conception, the individual terms are acquiring new meanings, new, undefined values,—are being raised to the new plane of the reconciling concept.<sup>10</sup> It follows that we use antithesis in a definition, that is, define an object as the union of necessarily opposed concepts, only when our prime interest is in the new undefined value that inheres in the object and is both rendering indifferent and transforming the terms of the antithesis.

The attitude that gives rise to the antithetic definition is not the attitude that characterized the sixteenth century apologists for poetry.<sup>11</sup> In the English criticism that issued in the Instruction-Delight definition of poetry we find that the interest was centered, the real values inhered, in the terms of the definition, in the elements of instruction and delight as these had been traditionally understood, rather than in poetry as a new, transforming concept. It was the function of poetry that was being considered, and this meant to the critics the relation of poetry to certain already defined elements of life; it was these well defined elements—one of them in particular, in which the interest centered. Poetry was not standing in its own right in an aesthetic realm; it was being subordinated to other realms, primarily to that of morality. "The

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd, *The Logic of Antithesis*.

<sup>11</sup> In the following survey I am simply calling attention to certain characteristics of early English criticism that are clearly defined by Gregory Smith in the introduction to his *Elizabethan Critical Essays* and by J. E. Spingarn in his *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*.

first problem of Renaissance criticism," Professor Spingarn writes, "was the justification of imaginative literature. The existence and continuity of the aesthetic consciousness, and perhaps, in a less degree, of the critical faculty, throughout the Middle Ages, can hardly be denied; yet distrust of literature was keenest among the very class of men in whom the critical faculty might be presupposed, and it was as the handmaid of philosophy, and most of all as the vassal of theology, that poetry was chiefly valued. In other words, the criteria by which imaginative literature was judged during the Middle Ages were not literary criteria."<sup>12</sup> And the period of English criticism represented by Sidney's *Defence*, the period with which we are here concerned, was, he explains, "prepared for by the attacks which the Puritans directed against poetry, and especially the drama."<sup>13</sup> Discussing the same period, Gregory Smith notes "that the greater forces which stimulated this literary defence were themselves unliterary."<sup>14</sup> The justification, in order to meet such attacks, was naturally forced to take its stand on extraneous grounds.

To put the matter more formally, Instruction and Delight were not the logical opposites of any universe of discourse. Poetry had not come into its own completely enough to serve as such a universe. It could not stand in its own self-sufficiency and perform the function of transvaluation that belongs to the reconciling concept of any antithesis. The very fact that the actual contest of the critics was so bitter, indicates that the concepts under consideration,—Instruction, Truth, Morality, and Delight, were still so narrowly conceived that they were susceptible merely of a compromising combination, not of that real reconciliation with their opposites which means transformation.<sup>15</sup>

The formula of the Reconciliation of Opposites, as distinct from any formula of combination, is one that could come into use only after a somewhat dogmatic morality had given place to aesthetic and philosophic bases of criticism. It manifests a spec-

<sup>12</sup> *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, p. 265.

<sup>14</sup> *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I, p. xiv.

<sup>15</sup> Just as the formal definition shows an inorganic combination of the elements Instruction and Delight, so more concrete analysis reveals an essentially inorganic conception of the relation between the two. Nash's figure of the gold setting and the pearl, cited above, is representative of the general attitude. The insistence upon an allegorical interpretation of literature is an instance of the same inorganic dualism.

ulative interest in art as art. The early nineteenth century had such an interest, and we find in certain instances that, in the face of this new fascinating value—Art, or the Absolute that it expresses—almost everything else that was considered at all in this connection was reduced to that state of relative indifference characterizing the formula of antithesis. Rest and Motion, the Vital and the Formal, Man and Nature, all were the logically opposed constituents of the definition. And yet in as far as they were reconciled, their meanings were raised (through the sense of this new value) to a higher plane. The principle signified an almost supreme interest in art. However great the social and economic unrest may have been, and however this may have expressed itself, there was to be found in the early nineteenth century a speculative and idealistic philosophic consciousness that had transcended moral and religious conflicts and could accept the universe as a whole. And for this consciousness art had become as big as the universe. The wholesomeness of the attitude involved may be questioned. Abstract speculation was frequently carried too far, and in the aesthetic field, as Kuno Francke suggests in his discussion of Schiller's valuation of art, the "apotheosis of art" may have done "injustice to other forms of human activity."<sup>16</sup> But, unwholesome or not, the fact remains; the period evinces such an interest, and this is what we find expressed in the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites.

### 3. DIFFERENT FORMS OF THE PRINCIPLE

If the logical investigation of Coleridge's antitheses is to be of anything but the most general sort it will be necessary at the outset to consider carefully two different kinds of opposition, both of which we find figuring in nineteenth century philosophic and aesthetic concepts.

To formulate art as the union of such logical opposites as Rest and Motion, the One and the Many, or Man and Nature—let the metaphysical terms be what they may—is obviously a very different thing from saying that opposition, symmetry, or contrast

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<sup>16</sup> "I shall not here dwell on the question whether this apotheosis of art does not do injustice to other forms of human activity. What led Schiller to these, we should be inclined to say, over-statements, was probably the absence in the Germany of his time of a healthy public life which could have taught him the value of any kind of strenuous productive work." (*German Ideals of Today*, pp. 81-2.)



is a fundamental structural principle of art, or even from saying as De Quincey says of the *Art of Conversation*, that the essence of the matter lies in "the electric kindling of life between two minds."<sup>17</sup> In the one case there is an antithesis consisting of terms that are logically opposed, that is, terms whose meanings are opposed; there is no attempt to reflect any structural opposition evident in the work of art. In the other case there is opposition without a doubt, but the terms have no logically opposed meanings,—they are identical units opposed only spatially; the opposition is the scientifically real opposition of the actual structure. The difference is clearly expressed in the following passage taken from an essay of Eucken's: "Contradiction reveals a totally different sort of relationship from any which is to be seen in the mechanical realm. It is not a collision of spatial elements but an incompatibility of content. This brings us to the concept of content, which is absolutely incomprehensible from the mechanical point of view."<sup>18</sup> We have the logical antithesis in which the terms have meaning or contents, and the mechanical opposition which is merely a space or direction formula but for that very reason reflects more directly than the other the structural opposition revealed in scientific analysis.<sup>19</sup>

It may be questioned whether these two sets of formulae are really forms of the same principle, but the question must be answered in the affirmative, for the mechanical formula has the same general logical significance that belongs to logical antithesis. It was found in the general analysis of antithesis that a certain balance, indifference, and even identity of terms is an essential characteristic; in the process of being brought together in antithesis the terms are losing their old meanings, being rendered indifferent and in a sense identical. Now in the mechanical formula the terms have completely lost their meanings and are identical,—equal, and opposed only in direction. The formula gives the limiting case of a process that is going on in all antithesis. Further, it was found to be characteristic that the terms are not simply losing their old meanings but are through the media-

<sup>17</sup> Works, Vol. X, p. 268.

<sup>18</sup> *Main Currents*, p. 183.

<sup>19</sup> Such a concept as De Quincey's of the opposition between two minds cannot be viewed as a piece of structural analysis, since it is the creative process instead of the finished product that is being analyzed, but the process itself in this case is being scientifically or mechanically construed.

tion of some new value being transformed and thus acquiring new meanings. Here again the logic of antithesis holds in the mechanical case, for it must be recognized that we construe the universe in terms of balanced elements or forces, that is, construe it mechanically, according to the general formula, Action = Reaction, only when we are contemplating it as means to some end, when we are exploiting present values in the interest of some new value about to be created.<sup>20</sup> Thus the mechanical antithesis also implies a process of transvaluation.

As a matter of fact in English criticism the two forms may be seen merging, the one into the other. It is no far cry from the formula of the union of the One and the Many, or of the Subject and the Object, to such a formula as is found in Coleridge's analysis of intelligence, taken over from Schelling. Intelligence is, he writes, "an indestructible power with two opposite and counteracting forces, which, by a metaphor borrowed from astronomy, we may call the centrifugal and centripetal forces. The intelligence in the one tends to *objectize* itself, and in the other to *know* itself in the object."<sup>21</sup> As soon as the terms of the antithesis have thus become forces opposed merely in direction, they are reduced to the concept of scientific or mechanical opposition, though it is to be noted, the concept is used here frankly as an analogy only.

It is evident that in studying Coleridge's use of the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites it is not enough to consider the general logical implication of the principle. There are two typical forms of the principle, the metaphysical and the mechanical, and it is necessary to distinguish between the two, since, as has been suggested already and will be further indicated later, they differ widely in significance.

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<sup>20</sup> I am here using Professor Lloyd's interpretation of Kant's category of reciprocity.

<sup>21</sup> Works, Vol. III, p. 350.

## CHAPTER I.

### SOME ASPECTS OF COLERIDGE'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT IN THEIR BEARING ON THE PRINCIPLE OF THE RECONCILIATION OF OPPOSITES

Coleridge's philosophical sympathies were such as to make him particularly hospitable to the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites. Although fundamentally an eclectic, hence quite inconsistent, he yet had certain fairly definite leanings which played no small part in determining his attitude toward this method of defining art. From a number of casual remarks it is evident that he was strongly impressed with the necessity of always emphasizing the positive rather than the negative. He makes a memorandum—"Always to bear in mind that profound sentence of Leibnitz that men's intellectual errors consist chiefly in *denying*. What they *affirm* with *feeling* is, for the most part, right—if it be a real affirmation, and not affirmative in form, negative in reality."<sup>1</sup> "Great good," he exclaims, "therefore, of such revolution as alters, not by exclusion, but by an enlargement that includes the former, though it places it in a new point of view."<sup>2</sup> Hence in his philosophizing he could not stop short of some positive principle.<sup>3</sup> But for one so steeped as Coleridge was in the atmosphere of mutually conflicting concepts this principle could not be one of easy-going optimism,—it must recognize the opposition even in the act of transcending it.

Moreover, even as he was averse to ultimate negation and contradiction, so he was to any form of division, signifying, as it must, mutual exclusion.<sup>4</sup> Distinction he would allow, but never, as a fundamental philosophical fact, division. "O! the power of names to give interest," he exclaims. "This is Africa! That is Europe! There is *division*, sharp boundary, abrupt change! and what are they in nature? Two mountain banks that make a noble river of the interfluent sea, not existing and acting with distinctness and manifoldness indeed, but at once and as one—no division, no change, no antithesis!"<sup>5</sup> Anything of ultimate value

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<sup>1</sup> *Anima Poetae*, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> *A. P.*, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Wylie, *Evolution of English Criticism*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Shawcross. Vol. I, p. LXXXVII.

<sup>5</sup> *A. P.*, p. 71.

must for Coleridge consist of elements which, while they may be distinguished, are yet capable of real fusion. And it is this kind of reality which expresses itself in the *Reconciliation of Opposites* as it could not in any mechanical sum of similarly conceived parts, in any of the theories of the atomists that he so despised.

Of even more immediate significance than such specific philosophic tenets, is Coleridge's general method of philosophizing, his attitude towards speculative thought. For there is that in Coleridge's criticism which inevitably brings the investigator back, sooner or later, to a study of the man's philosophical temperament. We can partially explain the strength of his critical efforts as the outgrowth, though a somewhat reactionary one, of earlier English criticism,<sup>6</sup> or as the fairly direct assimilation of German philosophy. We can partially explain their weakness as the result of the peculiarly difficult situation that had to be faced.<sup>7</sup> But in spite of all definable historic causes and sources, probably no writer has attempted a thorough-going discussion of Coleridge's criticism without finding that he was having to deal to an unwonted extent with a personality. Certainly it is next to impossible to consider Coleridge's use of the principle of the *Reconciliation of Opposites* except in the light of his philosophical temperament. It matters little which way we put it: the temper of his speculative thinking strongly colored his use of this principle; or, the principle had so insinuated itself into his thinking that it to some degree determined his philosophical temper. The consideration of the one is practically essential to an interpretation of the other.

There would be little use in attempting any really new analysis of Coleridge's temperament. The subject has been dealt with by many critics, and their efforts have resulted in not a few most happy characterizations. It is simply necessary to call to mind certain pertinent aspects of the matter.

Critics have never hesitated to take Coleridge's word for it that he sought refuge from life and finally even from art in a somewhat isolated world of metaphysical speculation.<sup>8</sup> The evidence is only too patent. First principles and the Absolute are accepted as his prime interests. Even his intuitive recognition of the scientific, evolutionary trend that thought was taking has

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<sup>6</sup> Wylie, *Evolution of English Criticism*, pp. 167, 200.

<sup>7</sup> Wylie, *Evolution of English Criticism*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>8</sup> See Brandl, *Life of Coleridge*, p. 278.

a strongly metaphysical, absolutist cast to it, which resulted in strange incongruities. As Leslie Stephen has noted, "How the law or laws of an organism are to be determined by some transcendental principle, overruling and independent of experiences, is just the point which remains inexplicable. He seems to appreciate what we now call the historic method. He uses the sacred phrase 'evolution,' which is simply the general formula of which the historic method is a special application. But we find that by evolution he means some strange process suggestive of his old mystical employment."<sup>9</sup>

Though a metaphysician himself, Coleridge was well aware that metaphysics was under fire. As Pater so aptly says,<sup>10</sup> he was one of those spirits of a transition era who feel the change everywhere and yet do not abandon themselves to it. Taking toward his own philosophizing the critical rather than the naïve attitude, he went to some trouble to justify his metaphysics in the face of the charges, superficial as they were, perpetually being brought against philosophy by an orthodox theology.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, he was conscious, as no student of Kant could fail to be, of a more fundamental criticism.<sup>12</sup> He himself recognized the dangers of two kinds of pathological thinking. On the one hand, he cautions men about the over-intellectualized solutions of formal problems, that lack any vital suggestion. "A metaphysical solution, that does not instantly *tell* you something in the heart is grievously to be suspected as apocryphal."<sup>13</sup> On the other hand he is keenly conscious of the unwholesomeness of an over-emotional metaphysics that lacks the virility of the practical. "Metaphysics," he writes, "make all one's thoughts equally corrosive on the body, by inducing a habit of making momentarily and common thought the subject of uncommon interest and intellectual energy."<sup>14</sup> "The *thinking* disease is that in which the feelings, instead of embodying themselves in *acts*, ascend and become materials of general reasoning and intellectual pride. . . . Ascent where nature meant descent, and thus shortening the process—viz., *feelings* made the subjects and tangible substance of thought, in-

<sup>9</sup> Hours in a Library, Vol. III, p. 366.

<sup>10</sup> Appreciations, pp. 65-66.

<sup>11</sup> A. P., p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> On Coleridge's attempt to justify his metaphysics, see Shairp, Studies in Poetry and Philosophy, pp. 174-175.

<sup>13</sup> Letters, p. 428.

<sup>14</sup> A. P., p. 23.

stead of action, realizations, *things done*, and as such externalized and remembered. On such meagre diet as feelings, evaporated embryos in their progress to *birth*, no moral being ever becomes healthy."<sup>15</sup>

Here Coleridge diagnoses his own case; for in spite of the fact that he recognizes the evil, he does himself err, and his error lies in giving to metaphysics too much rather than too little emotional significance. Abstract as they are, his writings are replete with a sense of metaphysical values. Whatever others may say, to Coleridge it was enough to find in the world of everyday experiences, in the waterfall on the mountain, or the wood fire in his study, rest, motion, unity, individuality, and all the other mysteries of the metaphysicians' world. In the philosopher's concepts he feels the miracle of the universe. "Time, space, duration, action, active passion passive, activeness, passiveness, reaction, causation, affinity—here assemble all the mysteries known. All is known-unknown, say, rather *merely* known. All is unintelligible, and yet Locke and the stupid adorers of that *fetish* earth-clod take all for granted."<sup>16</sup> He most assuredly lacks, as Pater tells us, that "certain shade of unconcern . . . which may be thought to mark complete culture in the handling of abstract questions."<sup>17</sup>

As already implied, Coleridge's writings are rich in illustration of his abstract philosophical principles and concepts. And yet there is nothing more baffling to any attempts at constructive thought than just this sort of promiscuous illustration that Coleridge delights in. The principle, the mystic concept, is discovered in some concrete manifestation—it matters not what; and the joy of the discovery absorbs all the vital force which might serve to suggest some practical application, or at least some systematic working out of its bearings along a particular line.<sup>18</sup> There is a complacent, almost sentimental finality about the experience, that is rather depressing to one who does not share in the metaphysical ecstasies. This exuberance with which he greeted any

<sup>15</sup> A. P., pp. 169-170.

<sup>16</sup> A. P., p. 185.

<sup>17</sup> Appreciations, p. 69.

<sup>18</sup> See Symons, *The Romantic Movement*, p. 125: "With so little sense of reality in anything, he has no sense of the reality of direct emotion, but is preoccupied, from the moment of the first shock, in exploring it for its universal principle, and then flourishes it, almost in triumph, at what he has discovered."



and every concrete illustration of a principle is simply one aspect of that general receptivity of temperament that is frequently commented upon. He found his illustrations quite uncritically just as he habitually assimilated the thoughts of other writers without any of that close scrutiny which would have rendered impossible his gross violations of the law of proprietorship.

'Receptive,' 'discursive,' 'expanding,' 'comprehensive,' 'general,' 'metaphysical,'—such are the epithets applied to his philosophical nature; and, as we should expect, his philosophizing is frequently characterized as 'verbal.' To quote at some length from John M. Robertson's essay on Coleridge: "His facility of phrase often led him into mere mock solutions. He gave a superfluous encouragement to verbalism in philosophy all around. His faculty being one of verbal expression, he tends to make verbal exercise take the place of investigation."<sup>19</sup> "Not even the verdict of Mr. Lowell can put his status as a philosophical critic beyond question; for it is precisely in philosophical generalization that Mr. Lowell himself is least satisfying. He had too much predilection to Coleridge's own intellectual sins of developing his philosophy uncritically from his sentiments, and of finding in a play of words an account of the constitution of things."<sup>20</sup> And, he continues,—“A less serious fault, arising from his verbal endowment and his defective hold on actuality, is Coleridge's way of repeating or dwelling at serious length on verbal distinctions even where they are in themselves justifiable.”<sup>21</sup>

Coleridge had, indeed, a very real concern for words. To him they were not mere arbitrary symbols of vital meanings, but had a vital reality of their own which to some extent justified verbalism. He recognized the mechanical element, and regretted the failure on the part of the multitude to find in words anything more. "Not only words, as far as relates to speaking," he notes, "but the knowledge of words as distinct component parts, which we learn by learning to read,—what an immense effect it must have on our reasoning faculties! Logical in opposition to real."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Robertson, *New Essays toward a Critical Method*, p. 174.

<sup>20</sup> Robertson, *New Essays toward a Critical Method*, p. 179.

<sup>21</sup> Robertson, *New Essays toward a Critical Method*, p. 180. Cf. also Omond, *The Romantic Triumph*, p. 167; Mackail, *Coleridge's Literary Criticism*, p. XII; and a *Damaged Eastern Sage*, *Spectator*, Oct. 26, 1895.

<sup>22</sup> A. P., p. 11. Cf. Pater, *Appreciations*, p. 70: "His very language is forced and broken lest some saving formula should be lost—*distincti-*

And in his concern for religion he fears "lest men by taking the words for granted never attain the feeling of the true *faith*. They only forbear, that is, even to suspect that the idea is erroneous, but do not *believe* the idea itself."<sup>23</sup> He is thoroughly conscious of the logical nature of the Logos, and yet he is jealous for the vitality that he knows rightfully belongs to it. "The more consciousness in our thoughts and words, and the less in our impulses and general actions, the better and more healthful the state both of head and heart,"<sup>24</sup> he tells us. And again, "Quaere, whether or no too great definiteness of terms in any language may not consume too much of the vital and idea-creating force in distinct, clear, full-made images, and so prevent originality. For original might be distinguished from positive thoughts."<sup>25</sup> Words, the implication is, should not be dead, ready-made symbols for ready-made thoughts, but should be plastic enough to be used creatively both by the writer and the reader. They must live.

His attempts to reinstate the Logos, to make of it a living power, are of many kinds, and are by no means consistent. Sometimes he treats the words, the symbols, as having a life of their own, quite distinct from, though in some way parallel to, the reality which they represent. The suggestion comes to him after listening to the opera, in which he seems to have been carried away by the opposition, intricate yet ever resolving into harmony, of the many voices, and he writes: "Words are not interpreters, but fellow-combatants."<sup>26</sup> The value of words consists to a large extent in the harmony of sounds that must parallel the harmony of meanings: "It is worthy notice (shown in the phrase 'I envy him such and such a thing,' meaning only, 'I regret I cannot share with him, have the same as he, without depriving him of it, or any part of it'), the instinctive passion in the mind for a *one word* to express *one act* of feeling. . . . On this instinct rest all the improvements . . . of style."<sup>27</sup> Even in the case of puns, ordinarily considered the most superficial kind of verbalism, he

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*tics, enucleation, pentad of operative Christianity*; he has a whole armory of these terms, and expects to turn the tide of human thought by fixing the sense of such expressions as 'reason'; 'understanding'; 'idea'."

<sup>23</sup> A. P., p. 86.

<sup>24</sup> Works, Vol. I, p. 166.

<sup>25</sup> A. P., p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> A. P., p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> A. P., p. 155.



finds real significance, or tries to find it, in the harmony which similarity in sound establishes between different meanings, accidental and unstable as this harmony may be.<sup>28</sup>

It is a curious combination, the fondness for paradoxes and double meanings, in a man to whom philosophy was so sacred. In explaining Coleridge's antipathy to Pope, Brandes says, "Das germanische Naturell in ihm war ein geborener Feind von Esprit, Epigrammen und Pointen;"<sup>29</sup> and we have to admit this even while we find him reveling in paradoxes that are marked by a strongly epigrammatic element. The combination can be explained only by recognizing that verbalism in Coleridge's estimation partook of the nature of the deepest realism. The justification or condemnation of such verbalism must rest ultimately with the logicians. But it is possible in this study at least to investigate the kind of aesthetic and literary criticism in which it issued.

To sum up briefly: A theoretical insistence upon inclusiveness, in all spheres, and a temperament that found in abstract metaphysical entities, in mere words, real emotional values of almost enervating ultimateness, made it natural that Coleridge should pin his faith to the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites. And it is natural that he should employ the logical form of this principle, in which the opposites to be reconciled are words and philosophical concepts rather than the forces and elements of a mechanically construed universe. The principle in this form serves primarily to define that which is positively inclusive, and absolute; at the same time it gives room for all the negations, oppositions and double meanings that must arise in any fundamental dealing with words and metaphysical concepts.

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<sup>28</sup> "[I] have learnt," he writes, "sometimes not *at all*, and seldom *harshly* to chide those conceits of words which are analogous to sudden fleeting affinities of mind. Even, as in a dance, you touch and join and off again, and rejoin your partner that leads down with you the dance, in spite of these occasional off-starts—for they, too, not merely conform to, but are of and in and help to form the delicious harmony." He would consider himself thrice blessed if he could find some eternally valid relation between the harmony of sound and the apparently arbitrary harmony of meanings. In his "intended essay in defence of punning," he means "to defend those turns of words . . . in certain styles of writing, by proving that language itself is formed upon associations of this kind . . . that words are not merely symbols of things and thoughts, but themselves things, and that any harmony in the things symbolized will perforce be presented to us more easily as well as with additional beauty, by a correspondent harmony of the symbols with each other." (A. P., pp. 108 and 225.)

<sup>29</sup> Hauptströmungen, Vol. IV, p. 37.

## CHAPTER II

### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF COLERIDGE'S APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE

From one point of view Coleridge's use of the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites might be taken as an attempt to resolve certain general aesthetic and philosophical dualisms based upon distinctions and oppositions that he recognized as unsound. Imbued to some extent with the newer and larger interpretations of metaphysical concepts inherent in the Kantian philosophy, he occasionally tries to do away with the dualism by translating one of the opposites into terms of the other. Thus he notes in one instance that the objectivity of an experience "consists in the universality of its subjectiveness."<sup>1</sup> Again, in a confused passage, he seems to be trying to express the fact that the individual consciousness is dependent for its very existence upon its relation to other conscious beings. "From what reason do I believe in *continuous* and ever-continuable consciousness? From conscience! Not for myself, but for my conscience, that is, my affections and duties towards others, I should have no self—for self is definition, but all boundary implies neighbourhood and is knowable only by neighbourhood or relations."<sup>2</sup> And in a semi-mystical vision he sees matter reduced to terms of mind in a manner strangely suggestive of Bergson's matter-memory hypothesis: "I saw in early youth, as in a dream, the birth of the planets; . . . All the deviations . . . were seen as one intuition of one, the self-same necessity, and this necessity was a law of spirit, and all was spirit. And in matter all beheld the past activity of others or their own—and this reflection, this echo is matter—its only essence if essence it be."<sup>3</sup> Sometimes, in his special concern for the mind-matter dualism, he tries to work out what is almost a system of psychophysical parallelism, a system which, while it does not abolish the dualism, at least neutralizes all opposition.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, on the purely critical side, we might find in Coleridge's use of the principle simply an attempt to end, once and

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<sup>1</sup> A. P., p. 296.

<sup>2</sup> A. P., p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> A. P., p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> A. P., pp. 101-102 and 112 ff.

for all, the conflict between the opposed concepts, reason and imagination, emphasized respectively by the classicists and the romanticists—if we may use the terms thus loosely, again an attempt to do away with a distinction he recognized as false. Real as the opposition may have been between the literary tendencies sponsored by the two schools, the concepts upon which they took their respective stands had, through their very opposition, developed until they became mutually inclusive instead of exclusive. This is generally recognized. With a criticism of literature increasingly wide in its scope and sensitive in its appreciation, the conception of reason, at one time associated with a narrow, arbitrary interpretation of the classical rules, developed, until, instead of negating, it came to include the freer genius of men like Spenser and Shakespeare, the sort of genius, or fancy as it was called, which would not fit the old formulas; on the other side, fancy developed into imagination, which did not negate, but included reason; as a consequence the conception of art came to include what had been incompatible opposites,—hence the definition of art as the union of reason and imagination, as the reconciliation of opposites.

Without a doubt Coleridge had a near interest in bringing to an end, or to what seemed to him an end, the conflict between the reason and the imagination. With his fine appreciation of Shakespeare, and much in a literature that did not conform to the classic "rules," he could not rest satisfied with any narrowly rationalistic aesthetic theory; nor, with his essentially philosophic temperament, could he permanently rest without any theory; he had to find some law in the seemingly lawless.<sup>5</sup> And his theory of the imagination, the question of plagiarism aside, has proved itself a positive constructive step in ending that form of the conflict then current. But I think no one can read Coleridge's works, especially his informal note-book jottings, without feeling that his interest in the principle was something more than an interest in reconciling a critical dualism based upon intellectual distinctions and oppositions that he recognized as artificial and unsound, the dualism of a conflict which belonged rightfully to the past. He seems to take positive delight in finding oppositions to reconcile. He never tires of calling attention to the fact that extremes meet, but he is very evidently looking to find in nature as many pairs of extremes as possible. Like many workers of good works he

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wylie, *Evolution of English Criticism*, pp. 196-197.

would be sadly disappointed if he could not find any evils to remedy. It is this positing of opposites fully as much as their reconciliation that is significant. We must not regard the principle as a means of recovery from some heaven-sent malady. As such, it is, from our standpoint, but a poor sort of recovery, brought about by artificial stimulants; for just as the dualism which Coleridge attempts to remedy is to us erroneously metaphysical and arbitrary, so many of his attempts at synthesis are bound to seem formal. Much that he says on this subject is, we must admit, a kind of talk that seems to bear verbal witness to some mode of reconciliation, but does not actually help the process along very much. And yet it is with this kind of talk, quite as much as with his more fully worked out theory of the imagination that we must concern ourselves if we are to understand the nature of the concrete critical applications of the principle.

It would, I think, be fair to call Coleridge's interest in the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites a constitutional malady. Throughout his writings, particularly those informal notes to which students turn for some of his keenest and most characteristic utterances, we find him luxuriating as it were, in the meeting of extremes. He owns up to it himself: "I should like to know whether or how far the delight I feel, and have always felt, in adages or aphorisms of universal or very extensive application is a general or common feeling with men, or a peculiarity of my own mind. I cannot describe how much pleasure I have derived from 'Extremes meet,' for instance, or 'Treat everything according to its nature,' and, the last, 'Be!' In the last I bring all inward rectitude to its test, in the former all outward morality to its rule, and in the first all problematic results to their solution, and reduce apparent contraries to correspondent opposites. How many hostile tenets has it enabled me to contemplate as fragments of truth, false only by negation and mutual exclusion?"<sup>6</sup> He is not fastidious as to the objects of his reflections. His philosophical sense is satisfied by contemplating such pairs of meeting extremes as dark and excess of light, self-absorption and worldly-mindedness, nothing and intensest absolute being;<sup>7</sup> it is equally well satisfied to note that the "tooth-ache, where the suffering is not extreme, often finds its speediest cure in the silent pillow; and gradually destroys our attention to itself by preventing us from

<sup>6</sup>A. P., pp. 300-301.

<sup>7</sup>A. P., p. 53.

attending to anything else;"<sup>8</sup> and, again, that "the thing that causes *instability* in a particular state, of itself causes *stability*. For instance, wet soap slips off the ledge—detain it till it dries a little, and it *sticks*."<sup>9</sup>

His whole mental make-up is so permeated by the consciousness of opposition that even his sense experiences come to him in terms of the great elemental sense contrasts, such as rest and motion. Evidence of this is to be found in numerous jottings collected in the *Anima Poetae*. "In the foam-islands in a fiercely boiling pool, at the bottom of a water-fall, there is sameness from infinite change."<sup>10</sup> "The spring with the little tiny cone of loose sand ever rising and sinking at the bottom, but its surface without a wrinkle."<sup>11</sup> "The steadfast rainbow in the fast moving, fast-hurrying hail mist! What a congregation of images and feelings, of fantastic permanence amidst the rapid change of the tempest—quietness the daughter of storm."<sup>12</sup> "The immoveableness of all things through which so many men were moving—a harsh contrast compared with the universal motion, the harmonious system of motions in the country, and everywhere in Nature. In the dim light London appeared to be a huge place of sepulchres through which hosts of spirits were gliding."<sup>13</sup>

Under his gaze the world becomes the expression, half metaphysical, half concrete, of unity and variety.<sup>14</sup> "Oh, said I, as I looked at the blue, yellow green and purple-green sea, with all its hollows and swells, and cut-glass surfaces—oh, what an *ocean* of lovely forms! And I was vexed, teased that the sentence sounded like a play of words! *That* it was not—The mind within me was struggling to express the marvellous distinctness and unconfounded personality of each of the million millions of forms, and yet the individual unity in which they subsisted."<sup>15</sup> Again, "The ribbed flame—its snatches of impatience, that half seem and only *seem* that half, to baffle its upward rush,—the eter-

<sup>8</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 434.

<sup>9</sup> A. P., p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> A. P., p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> A. P., p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> A. P., p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> A. P., pp. 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> For a full and appreciative discussion of Coleridge's habit of combining perception and speculation, see Aynard, *La Vie d'un Poète*, Chap. VIII, especially pp. 235-55.

<sup>15</sup> A. P., p. 100.



nal unity of individualities whose essence is in their distinguishableness, even as thought and *fancies* in the mind."<sup>16</sup>

Sometimes his observations are more philosophical, and sometimes even psychological: "How strange and awful is the synthesis of life and death in the gusty winds and falling leaves of an autumnal day!"<sup>17</sup> "The dim intellect sees an absolute oneness, the perfectly clear intellect *knowingly perceives it*. Distinction and plurality lie in the betwixt."<sup>18</sup> The union of the one and the many is, he explains, "the co-presence of feeling and life, limitless by their very essence, with form by its very essence limited, determinable, definite."<sup>19</sup> And again,—“O the complexities of the ravel produced by time struggling with eternity! *a* and *b* are different, and eternity or duration makes them one—this we call modification—the principle of all greatness in finite beings, the principle of all contradiction and absurdity.”<sup>20</sup>

Not infrequently the paradox is verbal, depending for its significance and its resolution upon the double meaning of some term. It is not a casual play on words. There are involved the logical opposition and the logical dual meanings that characterize all antitheses. "Shadow—its being subsists in shaped and definite

<sup>16</sup> A. P., pp. 110-11.

<sup>17</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 484.

<sup>18</sup> A. P., p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> A. P., p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> A. P., p. 155.—Coleridge's psychological genius is rapidly coming to be recognized, and for this the publication of the *Anima Poetae* is in no small measure responsible. A reviewer wrote of this book when it first appeared: "As one lays it down one is struck with the astonishing and unrelaxing faculty of self-introspection, analysis, and original thought that the book displays." (Westminster Rev. CXLV: 537.) And C. E. Vaughan in the Cambridge History (Vol. XI, p. 152), writes as follows: "In the...field of psychology, his results are both sounder in themselves [than in metaphysics] and more absolutely his own. His records of the working of the mind, especially under abnormal or morbid conditions, are extraordinarily minute and subtle. It would hardly be too much to say that he is the founder of what has since become a distinct, and most fruitful branch of philosophy: the study of experimental psychology. And this, which is fully known only to those who are familiar with *Anima Poetae*, is, perhaps his most original contribution to philosophy." Elton writes (A Survey of English Literature, Vol. II, p. 106) that his "psychological genius is the link between Coleridge's art and his thinking, and works most surely of all when his thinking is turned upon art itself, in the analysis of his intuitions of Shakespeare or Wordsworth." Again, he notes (pp. 120-1) that his "digressive spinning of thought out of thought is

nonentity."<sup>21</sup> "The excess of humanity and disinterestedness in polite society, the desire not to give pain, for example, not to talk of your own diseases and misfortunes, and to introduce nothing but what will give pleasure, destroy all humanity and disinterestedness, by making it intolerable, through desuetude, to listen to the complaints of our equals, or of any, where the listening does not gratify or excite some vicious pride and sense of superiority."<sup>22</sup> It is just this dual meaning, implicit in all antithesis, that lies at the basis of what is as poetic and penetrating a comment on death as one often comes upon: "Death, first of all, eats of the Tree of Life and becomes immortal. Describe the frightful metamorphosis."<sup>23</sup>

Coleridge had some recognition of the fact that the oppositions he dealt with were, at times, verbal, "logical," rather than real. "To be and to act," he notes, "two in Intellect (that mother of orderly multitude and half sister of Wisdom and Madness) but one in essence."<sup>24</sup> Even in the act of prefacing a metaphysical explanation, he exclaims: "I would make a pilgrimage to the deserts of Arabia to find the man who could make me understand how the *one can be many*. Eternal, universal mystery! It seems as if it were impossible, and yet it *is*, and it is everywhere! It is indeed a contradiction in *terms*, and only in terms."<sup>25</sup> But although he realized at times that these oppositions were abstract rather than real, he was quite unwilling to give them up.

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most marked when Coleridge is moving amongst theological or metaphysical ideas; whilst when he is actually describing mental processes, however evanescent, his hold of lucidity and of language is much greater. This is because he is on the ground observation, and is watching Hamlet or himself, and is nearer to his work as a poet or artist. In prose, he can hardly utter a feeling without noticing its birth; a procedure that in his case is not the bare desiccating analysis, which destroys the feeling itself in the act of reflection; but the words are charged with the feeling they describe, which Coleridge holds in the mind as a man holds a flower or a butterfly, intact, enjoying as well as noting it. No one has ever possessed this double machinery in such perfection as he: it is the source of his greatness as a literary critic both of form and matter; for he can re-word the artistic process of creation, both in himself and others,—the very process which the creator himself is commonly the last to apprehend distinctly."

<sup>21</sup> A. P., p. 177.

<sup>22</sup> A. P., pp. 52-3.

<sup>23</sup> A. P., p. 163.

<sup>24</sup> A. P., p. 97.

<sup>25</sup> A. P., p. 61.

He thought that he had reached something ultimate in Schelling's principle, developed, or rather embodied, in the *Biographia Literaria*, the principle of two opposed forces, the one contracting, the other expanding, which through their opposition create a world. Here the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites was for him of almost scientific validity, although it usually manifested itself in his writings in a more "logical" form than this semi-scientific construction of the universe in terms of mechanical forces.

On the whole, then, Coleridge was not so much interested in showing that distinctions and oppositions were unsound, as he was in showing that they were ever present and yet were being transcended. He ordinarily clung to the opposites—to the terms of the union—tenaciously.

With his fondness for words denoting metaphysical concepts, he would have been very slow to let them yield in prestige to any system of scientific or psychological analysis. He had an affection for these terms simply as heirlooms. Moreover, the new values that were coming to consciousness in philosophy and aesthetics were best expressed, in lieu of a new terminology, by these traditional opposed concepts, man and nature, and all the rest, conceived as reconciled. The oppositions and the reconciliations together suggested the newer, more inclusive, though undefined values. These pairs of opposites instead of being forms to be discarded, furnished the natural formulae for Coleridge to use in defining any and every experience or phenomenon.

There is further significance in the persistence of the antitheses, however. In accordance with Coleridge's well recognized fondness for the ideal in all things, we find him using this principle of balance as a norm. Like all terms of antitheses these concepts had no ultimate value taken separately, outside the formulae that opposed and reconciled them: the subject and the object could not stand alone as could the terms instruction and delight employed by the earlier critics. But it is essential to note that from the standpoint of mere existence the terms still claimed separate recognition. Not as an ultimate value, but as a pathological form of existence, Coleridge recognized subjectivity that lacked its normal supplementary objective expression, passion uncontrolled by law or form, and, on the other hand, the formal uninformed by the vital. Coleridge recognized such cases, and condemned them as abnormal: "Take away from sounds the



sense of outness, and what a horrible disease would every minute become! A drive over a pavement would be exquisite torture. What, then, is sympathy if the feelings be not disclosed? An inward reverberation of the stifled cry of distress."<sup>26</sup> "One excellent use of communication of sorrow to a friend is this, that in relating what ails us, we ourselves first know exactly what the real grief is, and see it for itself in its own form and limits. Unspoken grief is a misty medley of which the real affliction only plays the first fiddle, blows the horn to a scattered mob of obscure feelings."<sup>27</sup> Coleridge finds this pathological one-sidedness in many phases of life: "I have never known a trader in philanthropy, who was not wrong in heart somewhere or other. Individuals so distinguished are usually unhappy in their family relations,—men not benevolent or beneficial to individuals, but almost hostile to them, yet lavishing money, and labor, and time, on the race, the abstract notion. The cosmopolitanism which does not spring out of, and blossom upon, the deep-rooted stem of nationality or patriotism, is a spurious and rotten growth."<sup>28</sup> "The power, in a democracy, is in focal points, without a centre; and, in proportion as such democratical power is strong, the strength of the central government ought to be intense—otherwise the nation will fall to pieces."<sup>29</sup> In the last two notes the metaphysical coloring of the balance which is violated is not strong, yet even such observations were doubtless the outgrowth of the philosophical contemplation of the principle.

The corrective function of Coleridge's philosophy is clearly brought out in Cestre's interesting book, *La Revolution Française et les Poètes Anglais*. To quote a single passage from several that are pertinent: "Il voua sa vie à une double tâche qu'il jugeait indispensable au bien-être matériel et moral de son pays: rappeler à ceux qui profitent des avantages sociaux les obligations de la justice et de l'humanité, la loi du changement; rappeler à ceux qui souffrent des imperfections de la société, la discipline morale et sociale, la loi de la permanence."<sup>30</sup> Of all philosophic formulae, that of the union of opposites is perhaps best adapted to such corrective purposes; certainly it is better adapted than

<sup>26</sup> A. P., p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> A. P., p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 474.

<sup>29</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 396.

<sup>30</sup> P. 474. See also pp. 445 and 485.

any monistic concept that ignores dualism or treats it as intellectually unsound, for it is essential that the formula reflect the truths of actual conditions as well as the ideal to be attained through their union.

Thus the union of opposites played a double role. It was a universally valid form of analysis that could be applied to any experience; but it was also conceived as a standard or norm—an ideal which was not always realized.<sup>31</sup> It is the sanity of the mind which is "between superstition with fanaticism on the one hand, and enthusiasm with diseased slowness to action on the other."<sup>32</sup> It is the true religion which is "a synthesis of facts and ideas."<sup>33</sup> And "a due mean of motive and impulse is the *practicable object* of our moral philosophy."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Of interest in connection with Coleridge's dual use of the principle is the theory propounded by Shawcross that Coleridge was led through Kant to regard the imagination (which is for him the prime faculty of mediation or reconciliation) "in a two-fold aspect—as the common property of all minds, and also, in its highest potency, as the gift of a few." (*Biographia Literaria*, ed. Shawcross, Vol. I, p. xlv.)

<sup>32</sup> Works, Vol. III, p. 165.

<sup>33</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 378.

<sup>34</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 319. The italics are mine.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE EXPRESSION OF THE PRINCIPLE IN COLERIDGE'S AESTHETIC THEORY<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge's application of the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites to aesthetics is much what we should expect from the use he makes of it in his general observations and reflections. For art lends itself particularly well to the sort of analysis to which Coleridge was continually subjecting life itself. There is in his art criticism just the same sort of baffling versatility that characterized his more general use of the principle. He is constantly shifting his point of view, giving us now a metaphysical definition of art, now a statement of the faculties involved in aesthetic creation or appreciation.

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<sup>1</sup> It is now generally recognized that Coleridge took much of the material for his lectures on art very directly from Schelling and August Schlegel. Parallel passages for a number of Coleridge's doctrines considered in this section and the following may be found in the appendix to Vol. IV of Coleridge's Works (Sarah Coleridge's notes), and in a dissertation entitled *The Indebtedness of Samuel Taylor Coleridge to August Wilhelm von Schlegel* by Miss Helmholz (University of Wisconsin Bulletin, Philology and Literature Series, Vol. III, 1903-7). In concluding her dissertation Miss Helmholz writes:

"Coleridge has leniently been called the transmitter of German doctrines in criticism as well as in philosophy [referring to Miss Wylie's *Evolution of English Criticism*]. He has been judged, and rightly, perhaps, by the suggestive and fruitful influence of those doctrines upon English criticism, doctrines into which he, no doubt, transfused something of his own fine poetic insight. And suggestive and fruitful they have been; though presented to the world in fragments and mere hints. Through them an important phase of the intellectual wealth of Germany was opened to Englishmen, and English critical activity enriched beyond all measure.

"Yet the present investigation shows that Coleridge is indebted to Schlegel for most of his principles of criticism and for other material amounting to no inconsiderable number of pages, and though, to a certain extent, he may have borrowed unconsciously, he is nevertheless censurable for indifference to the property of others."

Recognizing the strong German influence, one must be wary about crediting Coleridge with originality in such aesthetic doctrines as those of the imagination, tragedy and comedy, unity, the relation of art and nature, etc. As far as I have been able to determine, however, the larger part of his detailed criticism of Shakespeare's plays is his own.

Perhaps the most striking impression in a general view of his aesthetic theorizing is that made by his metaphysical definition of art. The essence of it is that art is a reconciliation of certain pairs of opposites. Not simply in his formal definitions and analyses, but in the theorizing so evident in his concrete criticism, there is the notion of art that is summed up in his most comprehensive definition of the imaginative or poetic faculty: "This power...reveals itself in the balance or reconcilment of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement."<sup>2</sup> No one pair of these opposites can be taken as more fundamental than any other. Whatever pair we may select, we immediately find ourselves entangled in several others, that is, provided the general philosophical notion involved has laid hold on us, provided we have "got the habit."

This method of defining art is, of course, nothing more, or rather nothing less, than the direct reflection of the German philosophy of the time. It is by no means my intention to discuss the significance of this philosophy to either Germany or England. I wish simply, in the light of the logical significance of the principle, to call attention to certain characteristics of its use by Coleridge.

We must note, in the first place, that such formulae as the union of the vital and the formal, the individual and the universal, are not primarily calculated to suggest either a scientific, structural analysis of the work of art, or a psychological description of the aesthetic experience. No single term of a logical antithesis gives either a structural or a psychological unit. Such units involve both terms, for the formulation of the antithesis indicates the consciousness that the union of the terms is essential to any ultimate, self-sufficient unit. These formulae must be taken as metaphysical rather than scientific, as approaching pure or "absolute" definitions of art.

And as such, the formulae are most suggestive. Art, at least

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<sup>2</sup> Works, Vol. III, p. 374. The development and significance of Coleridge's theory of the imagination are set forth in some detail in the introduction of Shawcross's edition of the *Biographia Literaria*.

equally with life, was making clear the necessity of larger interpretations of these antithetical terms. The paradoxical definitions served to suggest the larger, more ultimate values that were coming to consciousness. A few of the definitions and analyses that take this form may be quoted:

1. "Art... is the mediatress between, and reconciler of, nature and man."<sup>3</sup> It consists of a "translation of man into nature."<sup>4</sup> The language of the genius, of Shakespeare in *King Lear*, for instance, is a blending of the language of man with the language of nature. The elements of the language of man "are pure arbitrary modes of recalling the object, and for visual mere objects they are not only sufficient, but have infinite advantages from their very nothingness *per se*. But the language of nature is a subordinate *Logos*, that was in the beginning, and was with the thing it represented, and was the thing it represented."<sup>5</sup> The imaginative symbol combines the two.

2. In the work of art the vital and the formal must be thoroughly reconciled. "No work of true genius dares want its appropriate form, neither indeed is there any danger of this. As it must not, so genius can not, be lawless; for it is even this that constitutes it genius—the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination."<sup>6</sup> The thorough-going union of the formal and the vital, with the larger interpretations of both that are involved, is poetically suggested in an entry in the *Anima Poetae*: "Does the sober judgment previously measure out the banks between which the stream of enthusiasm shall rush with its torrent sound? Far rather does the stream itself plough up its own channel and find its banks in the adamant rocks of nature!"<sup>7</sup>

3. In this connection we must note Coleridge's half metaphysical, half scientific or descriptive, definition of poetry, as the reconciliation of means and end, part and whole. "Poetry, or rather a poem, is a species of composition, opposed to science, as having intellectual pleasure for its object, and as attaining its end by the use of language natural to us in a state of excitement,—but distinguished from other species of composition, not excluded from the former criterion, by permitting a pleasure from the whole consistent with a consciousness of pleasure from the com-

<sup>3</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 328.

<sup>4</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 329.

<sup>5</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> A. P., p. 139.

ponent parts;—and the perfection of which is, to communicate from each part the greatest immediate pleasure compatible with the largest sum of pleasure on the whole.”<sup>8</sup> Hence, put in what might almost be considered terms of structure, we find that in verse “the words, the *media*, must be beautiful,” that is, the means must partake of the nature of the end. Prose is defined as “words in their best order,” poetry as “the *best* words in the best order.”<sup>10</sup>

4. Art consists in the functioning of two opposed human faculties. For example, the origin of metre Coleridge traces “to the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion. It might be easily explained likewise in what manner this salutary antagonism is assisted by the very state, which it counteracts; and how this balance of antagonists became organized into metre. . . by a supervening act of the will and judgment, consciously and for the foreseen purpose of pleasure.”<sup>11</sup>

Taken simply as metaphysical definitions the value of these formulae can scarcely be overestimated. But Coleridge was not satisfied to confine himself to the essentially abstract and static conception of art and the aesthetic faculties which such formulae involve, the conception which is, at least from one point of view, their primary justification. Mingled with his metaphysics are many notes on problems of concrete structure and of aesthetic processes. The principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites is applied to both sets of problems.

On the structural side the principle appears clearly in such laws as those of contrast and dramatic conflict (illustrated in the next section of this paper.) When it is applied to descriptions of aesthetic processes with more elaboration than in the instance just cited there is sometimes an unfortunate mixture of the metaphysical and the scientifically real<sup>12</sup>—and Coleridge was so imbued with the dynamic conception of art that he could not refrain from dealing with processes. Art is not simply a union of man and nature, it is the interfusion of man into nature. So far so good. In general definitions of this sort there is no reason

<sup>8</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 20. Cf. Vol. III, p. 371.

<sup>9</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 468.

<sup>10</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 293.

<sup>11</sup> Works, Vol. III, p. 415.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Aynard: “Coleridge n’a jamais su distinguer le point de vue scientifique du point de vue métaphysique.”—*La Vie d’un Poète*, p. 359.



for quarreling with Coleridge; we can take such definitions metaphysically, abstractly, in spite of the suggestion of the actual process; we need not raise the objection that man and nature are too inseparable to be distinct elements of a process. But when Coleridge deliberately sets out to describe psychological processes, and uses as actual elements in the process what are really metaphysical abstractions such as form and content, the results are confusing. In his *Essay on Beauty* he notes that "when a thing excites us to receive it in such and such a mould, so that its exact correspondence to that mould is what occupies the mind,—this is taste or the sense of beauty."<sup>13</sup> Coleridge is here pretending to give psychology, not metaphysics, yet to say that the mind is occupied by the correspondence between form and content implies a dualism that is psychologically unsound.

Such confusion is not to be wondered at, though Coleridge has been bitterly criticised for it.<sup>14</sup> I call attention to it simply as

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<sup>13</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 372.

<sup>14</sup> De Quincey writes as follows regarding a case in which Coleridge tried to treat the logical opposites likeness and difference psychologically: "Coleridge was copious, and not without great right, upon the subject of Art . . . And yet, of the topics on which he was wont eloquently to hold forth, there was none on which he was less satisfactory—none on which he was more acute, yet none on which he was more prone to excite contradiction and irritation, if that had been allowed.

"Here, for example, is a passage from one of his lectures on art:

"'It is sufficient that philosophically we understand that in all imitations two elements must coexist, and not only coexist, but must be perceived as existing. Those two constituent elements are likeness and unlikeness, or sameness and difference, and in all genuine creations of art there must be a union of these disparates. The artist may take this point of view where he pleases, provided that the desired effect be perceptibly produced, that there be likeness in the difference, difference in the likeness, and a reconciliation of both in one. If there be likeness to nature without any check of difference, the result is disgusting, and the more complete the delusion the more loathsome the effect. Why are such simulations of nature as wax-work figures of men and women so disagreeable? Because, not finding the motion and the life all we expected, we are shocked as by a falsehood, every circumstance of detail, which before induced you to be interested, making the distance from truth more palpable. You set out with a supposed reality, and are disappointed and disgusted with the deception; whilst in respect to a work of genuine imitation you begin with an acknowledged total difference, and then every touch of nature gives you the pleasure of an approximation to truth.'

"In this exposition there must be some oversight on the part of Coleridge. He tells us in the beginning that, if there be 'likeness to nature without any check of difference, the result is disgusting.' But the case of

a means of indicating the legitimate and the illegitimate use of metaphysical antitheses. When these abstract terms were used as actual elements of a supposedly scientifically real process, the result was unfortunate.

These metaphysical formulae suggest a method of definition or analysis applicable to any form of art, just as in Coleridge's general use of the principle we found them to serve as philosophic formulations of any mode of experience. But in the realm of aesthetics, again, we find the principle serving also as a norm, as an ideal not always realized. The fundamental opposites taken singly represented artistic or literary tendencies and critical tenets that Coleridge recognized as one-sided, as needing to be supplemented by their logical opposites. Sensuousness in poetry, he notes, "insures that framework of objectivity, that definiteness and articulation of imagery, and that modification of the images themselves, without which poetry becomes flattened into mere didactics of practice, or evaporated into a hazy, unthoughtful day-dreaming;"<sup>15</sup> he was clearly conscious of a pathologically subjective kind of poetry. As Miss Wylie notes, "There was... a limit in his wide literary clarity; his universal appreciation found its exception in his antipathy to both the formalism and the emotionalism of the eighteenth century. The painstaking care of the Classicist was to him a vain and external formality; the sentimentality of a Sterne or a Richardson shocked the moralist who would widen, not narrow, the realm of law; the earlier criticism offered little to the philosopher who sought to establish the laws of artistic creation and enjoyment."<sup>16</sup> Art in general has, through its balance of opposites, an idealizing influence upon life. "Idly talk they who speak of poets as mere indulgers of fancy, imagination, superstition, etc. They are the bridlers by delight, the puri-

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the wax-work, which is meant to illustrate this proposition, does not at all conform to the conditions; the result is disgusting certainly, but not from any want of difference to control the sameness, for, on the contrary, the difference is confessedly too revolting; and apparently the distinction between the two cases described is simply this—that in the illegitimate case of the wax-work the likeness comes first and the unlikeness last, whereas in the other case this order is reversed." (Posthumous Works, Vol. II, pp. 20-24.)

Whether De Quincey is fair to Coleridge or not, he has hit upon a very real difficulty in showing that Coleridge makes likeness and difference distinct elements of a time process.

<sup>15</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> *Evolution of English Criticism*, p. 167.



fiers; they that combine all these with reason and order—the true protoplasts—Gods of Love who tame the chaos.”<sup>17</sup> But there are all kinds of art, and Coleridge distinguishes carefully between those artists—poets—who attained the ideal, and those who failed.<sup>18</sup>

Students of Coleridge's aesthetic theory may be impatient over his metaphysical speculations, especially as they seem so often to be plagiarisms. They may feel that they are not giving us Coleridge, that they are simply abstract and uncritical borrowings. But in a very real sense they are Coleridge. The very fact of the promiscuous borrowing, and the abstract status in which his theories are often left, reflect his peculiarly receptive and metaphysical temperament. And I think it is fair to say that were it not for the metaphysical opposites, we should lack many of his keenest concrete criticisms; it was essential that this form of thought should be with Coleridge a constitutional habit.

Moreover, whether his abstract theorizings give us Coleridge

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<sup>17</sup> A. P., p. 96.

<sup>18</sup> Although Coleridge usually maintains that ancient and modern art represent two distinct types, each to be judged according to its own laws, and hence declines to rank one above the other, yet there are instances in which he selects the modern form as illustrative of a unity in variety apparently not attained by the ancients. The traditional unities, he explains, “were to a great extent the natural form of that which in its elements was homogeneous, and the representation of which was addressed pre-eminently to the outward senses.” (Works, Vol. IV, p. 35.) Hence it appealed to a “sort of more elevated understanding.” The modern romantic drama on the other hand, appealed to the imagination and the reason, and both of these, as Coleridge frequently tells us, are the faculties which fuse, in reconciling, the heterogeneous and opposed. (Works, Vol. IV, pp. 35-36.)

Again, of the Athenian and Shakespearian drama he writes: “The very essence of the former consists in the sternest separation of the diverse in kind and the disparate in degree, whilst the latter delights in interlacing, by a rainbow-like transfusion of hues, the one with the other.” (Works, Vol. IV, p. 36.)

And, comparing the romance language with the Latin,—“We find it less perfect in simplicity and relation—the privileges of a language formed by the mere attraction of homogeneous parts;—but yet more rich, more expressive and various, as one formed by more obscure affinities out of a chaos of apparently heterogeneous atoms. As more than a metaphor,—as an analogy of this, I have named the true genuine modern poetry the romantic; and the works of Shakspeare are romantic poetry revealing itself in the drama.” (Works, Vol. IV, p. 35.)

In the face of the new unity in variety the classical unity has come to seem to Coleridge—at times certainly—mere homogeneity.

or not, we must admit their significance as definitions of art. The concept of evolutionary development that Coleridge frequently employs, may be better adapted to the description of artistic processes—though even this has serious limitations—than the concept of the reconciliation of metaphysical opposites. But the latter, while not of scientific value, served to make prevalent certain larger interpretations of the elements of art and life that, in their turn, are serving as the basis of a sounder scientific procedure.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the concept served, as will be more apparent in the discussion of Coleridge's concrete analyses, as a generally applicable standard of criticism.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Miss Wylie's conclusion to her more general study of Coleridge's criticism: "It was inevitable that the criticism arising in such an age, and largely representing its reactionary tendencies, should be a promise and a suggestion; that its suggestion returned to vitalize a sturdier criticism and a more experimental philosophy, is its great glory . . . In his [Coleridge's] suggestions lies the germ of a higher development, the spirit that must inform the great and enduring work of the future. Fragmentary as his writings are, there is yet opened through them an ideal criticism that has never been reached, and for which we can only hope if the clear intellectuality of the eighteenth century shall come to blend with the spirituality that complemented and destroyed it." (*Evolution of English Criticism*, pp. 203-204.)

## CHAPTER IV

### COLERIDGE'S APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE TO CERTAIN LITERARY PROBLEMS

To many, Coleridge's pieces of concrete criticism seem much more significant than his abstract speculations. J. W. Mackail,<sup>1</sup> for example, while thoroughly appreciative of Coleridge's ability to show us, through his concrete Shakespeare criticism, things "that we had not seen before, but see with a thrill of recognition when he points them out to us,"<sup>2</sup> yet objects to his metaphysical criticism rather seriously. He notes that poetry and philosophy are not the same things, and writes: "When Coleridge, as he so often does, . . . tries to express the function of poetry in the terms of his own metaphysical system, he not only ceases to be a poet but ceases to be a critic." He finds that while the errors and exaggerations of Coleridge's Shakespeare criticism may be explained on the grounds that he had an "inveterate tradition" to break down, yet the new tradition that he helped create was "largely false," and his criticism, tremendously illuminating for his own generation, is illuminating for us "less as a systematic exposition and theory of Shakespeare than as a body of observations and records."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Coleridge's Literary Criticism, Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> P. xvii.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. xiii-xv. It is natural that the defects of Coleridge's philosophy should be more evident to critics of to-day than to the progressive minds of his own period and that immediately following. The most whole-hearted eulogy of his Shakespeare criticism that I have come upon is that of Charles Knight, in his *Studies of Shakespeare* published in 1849,—studies taken largely from the Pictorial and Library editions of Shakespeare published 1838-1844. Knight writes:

"At the beginning of the nineteenth century a new school of criticism began to establish itself amongst us. CHARLES LAMB and WILLIAM HAZLITT led the way in approaching Shakespeare, if not wholly in the spirit of Aesthetics, yet with love, with deep knowledge, with surpassing acuteness, with unshackled minds. But a greater arose. A new era of critical opinion upon Shakespeare, as propounded by Englishmen, may be dated from the delivery of the lectures of SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, at the Surrey Institute, in 1814. What that great man did for Shakespeare during the remainder of his valuable life can scarcely be appreciated by the public. For his opinions were not given to the world in formal treat-

Yet it must be recognized, and to some extent it is recognized, that Coleridge's power of concrete analysis and his power of constructive metaphysical philosophizing were interrelated. Lowell put the matter well when he said, "His analysis was elucidative mainly, if you will, but could not have been so except in virtue of the processes of constructive and philosophical criticism that had gone on so long in his mind as to make its subtle apprehension seem an instinct. As he was the first to observe some of the sky's appearances and some of the shyer revelations of outward nature, so he was also first in noting some of the more occult phenomena of thought and emotion. It is a criticism of parts and passages, and was scattered carelessly in *obiter dicta*, but it was not a bringing of the brick as a specimen of the whole house. It was comparative anatomy, far rather, which from a single bone reconstructs the entire living organism."<sup>4</sup>

In the following sections of this study I am trying to discover how closely Coleridge's power of critical insight, as revealed in his literary criticism, is correlated with the principle that is probably the basic principle of his metaphysics—that of the Union of Opposites. I have classified the material roughly according to the several problems of Dramatic Character, Tragic-Comedy, Imitation, and Unity.

The larger part of the material is taken from Coleridge's Shakespeare criticism. In his chapter on Coleridge, Symons writes: "Most of his best criticism circles around Shakespeare; and he took Shakespeare almost as frankly in the place of Nature, or of poetry. He affirms, 'Shakespeare knew the human mind, and its most minute and intimate workings, and he never

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ises and ponderous volumes. They were fragmentary, they were scattered, as it were, at random; many of them were the oral lessons of that wisdom and knowledge which he poured out to a few admiring disciples. But they have had their effect. For ourselves, personally, we owe a debt of gratitude to that illustrious man that can never be repaid. If in any degree we have been enabled to present Shakespeare to the popular mind under new aspects, looking at him from a central point, which should permit us, however imperfectly, to comprehend something of his wondrous *system*, we owe the desire so to understand him ourselves to the germs of thought which are scattered through the works of that philosopher; to whom the homage of future times will abundantly compensate for the partial neglect of his contemporaries. We desire to conclude this criticism of the opinions of others upon the works of Shakespeare, in connection with the imperfect expression of our own sense of those opinions, with the name of COLERIDGE." (P. 560.)

<sup>4</sup> Prose Works, Vol. VI, p. 73.

introduced a word, or a thought, in vain or out of place.' This granted (and to Coleridge it is essential that it should be granted, for in less than the infinite he cannot find space in which to use his wings freely) he has only to choose and define, to discover and illuminate. In the 'myriad-minded man,' in his 'oceanic mind,' he finds all the material that he needs for the making of a complete aesthetic."<sup>5</sup> This tells the whole story. In Shakespeare, art and nature were one, and, in his art, the ideal and the actual. Hence Shakespeare furnishes the most admirable illustrations of the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites, which was a formula, now of life or art in general, and now of the ideal. It is largely in Coleridge's appreciative criticism of Shakespeare that we find his concrete literary applications of the principle.

### 1. ANALYSIS OF THE DRAMATIC CHARACTER

In analyzing the characters of the drama and of prose fiction Coleridge finds many instances of the union of opposites, especially of the universal and the individual. There is a universal basis in all character, he maintains, and this is, in the individual, modified by circumstances. He almost puts the matter in terms of heredity and environment in his discussion of Shakespeare's women characters: "In all Shaksperian women there is essentially the same foundation and principle; the distinct individuality and variety are merely the result of the modification of circumstances, whether in Miranda the maiden, in Imogen the wife, or in Katherine the queen."<sup>6</sup> And in another passage, the universal appears as the past experience stored up, as it were, in every individual:<sup>7</sup> "In Shakspeare all the elements of womanhood are holy, and there is the sweet, yet dignified feeling of all that *continuates* society, as sense of ancestry and of sex, with a purity unassailable by sophistry because it rests not in the analytic processes, but in that sane equipoise of the faculties, during which THE FEELINGS ARE REPRESENTATIVE OF ALL PAST EXPERIENCE,—NOT OF THE INDIVIDUAL ONLY, but of all those by whom she has been educated, and their predecessors even up to the first mother that lived."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The Romantic Movement, p. 135.

<sup>6</sup>Works, Vol. IV, p. 76.

<sup>7</sup>In the quotations in this section I have taken the liberty of putting certain phrases in small capitals to make the concept of opposition more easily traceable. The italics are Coleridge's own.

<sup>8</sup>Works, Vol. IV, pp. 75-76.



Even the superstitious element in human nature may represent the universal element—the general race experience appearing in the individual in the form of presentiments. In his notes on Richard II, Act II, Scene 1, Coleridge comments on John of Gaunt's forewarnings to the king as follows: "And mark in this scene Shakspeare's gentleness in touching the tender superstitions, the *terrae incognitae* of presentiments, in the human mind; and how sharp a line of distinction he commonly draws between these obscure FORECASTINGS OF GENERAL EXPERIENCE IN EACH INDIVIDUAL, and the vulgar errors of mere tradition. Indeed, it may be taken once for all as the truth, that Shakspeare, in the absolute universality of his genius, always reverences *WHATEVER ARISES OUT OF OUR MORAL NATURE*; he never profanes his muse with a contemptuous reasoning away of the genuine and general, however unaccountable, feelings of mankind."<sup>9</sup>

Not only does Coleridge conceive the universal to be one of a pair of opposites constituting the character, but the universal element itself consists in the just balance of certain other opposites. In all men, Coleridge maintains, there is a balance of certain fundamental, opposed tendencies. Even such a character as that of Don Quixote, where individuality is carried to the extreme, illustrates not merely the necessity in a normal being, but the universal, scientific fact of balance. The subjective always requires its objective counterpart:

"He has no knowledge of the sciences or scientific arts which give to the meanest portions of matter an intellectual interest, and which *ENABLE THE MIND TO DECIPHER IN THE WORLD OF THE SENSES THE INVISIBLE AGENCY—THAT ALONE, OF WHICH THE WORLD'S PHENOMENA ARE THE EFFECTS AND MANIFESTATIONS,—AND THUS, AS IN A MIRROR TO CONTEMPLATE ITS OWN REFLEX, ITS LIFE IN THE POWERS, ITS IMAGINATION IN THE SYMBOLIC FORMS, ITS MORAL INSTINCTS IN THE FINAL CAUSES, AND ITS REASON IN THE LAWS OF MATERIAL NATURE*: but—estranged from all the motives to observation from self-interest—the persons that surround him too few and too familiar to enter into any connection with his thoughts, or to require any adaptation of his conduct to their particular characters or relations to himself—his judgment lies fallow, with nothing to excite, nothing to employ it. Yet,—and here is the point, where genius even of the most perfect kind, allotted but to few in the course of many ages, does not pre-

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<sup>9</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 126.



clude the necessity in part, and in part counterbalance the craving by sanity of judgment, without which genius either cannot be, or cannot at least manifest itself,—THE DEPENDENCY OF OUR NATURE ASKS FOR SOME CONFIRMATION FROM WITHOUT, THOUGH IT BE ONLY FROM THE SHADOWS OF OTHER MEN'S FICTIONS.

"Too uninformed, and with too narrow a sphere of power and opportunity to rise into the scientific artist, or to be himself a patron of art, and with too deep a principle, and too much innocence to become a mere projector, Don Quixote has recourse to romances."<sup>10</sup>

In commenting upon Don Quixote's appeal to Sancho, "But tell me, on your life, have you ever seen a more valorous knight than I, upon the whole face of the known earth? Have you read in story of any other, who has, or ever had, more bravery in assailing, more breath in holding out, more dexterity in wounding, or more address in giving a fall?" Coleridge notes: "REMARK THE NECESSITY UNDER WHICH WE ARE OF BEING SYMPATHIZED WITH, FLY AS HIGH INTO ABSTRACTION AS WE MAY, AND HOW CONSTANTLY THE IMAGINATION IS RECALLED TO THE GROUND OF OUR COMMON HUMANITY!"<sup>11</sup>

Sometimes it seems that the mere existence of this balance of opposites, either in the character or in the experiences which he undergoes, is what constitutes the artistic or dramatic element, universal as the balance is. Troilus, the inference is, represents the ideal hero, his love showing the union of opposites; it is "affection, PASSIONATE indeed,—swoln with the CONFLUENCE OF YOUTHFUL INSTINCTS AND YOUTHFUL FANCY, and growing in the radiance of hope newly risen, in short enlarged by the collective sympathies of nature,—but still having a depth of calmer element in A WILL STRONGER THAN DESIRE, more entire than choice, and WHICH GIVES PERMANENCE TO ITS OWN ACT by converting it into faith and duty."<sup>12</sup> One of the special characteristics of Shakespeare's plays he finds to be "signal adherence to the great law of nature, that ALL OPPOSITES TEND TO ATTRACT AND TEMPER EACH OTHER. PASSION IN SHAKESPEARE GENERALLY DISPLAYS LIBERTINISM, BUT INVOLVES MORALITY; and if there are exceptions to this, they are, independently of their intrinsic value, all of them

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<sup>10</sup>Works, Vol. IV, pp. 266-267.

<sup>11</sup>Works, Vol. IV, pp. 271-272.

<sup>12</sup>Works, Vol. IV, p. 98.

indicative of individual character, and, like the farewell admonitions of the parent, have an end beyond the parental relation."<sup>13</sup>

The union of the universal and the individual, or the objective and the subjective, serves to explain the effect produced by the ghost in Hamlet. In the first scene Horatio explains the ghost historically, as it were, and Coleridge notes: "And observe, upon the Ghost's reappearance, how much Horatio's courage is increased by having translated the late INDIVIDUAL SPECTATOR INTO GENERAL THOUGHT AND PAST EXPERIENCE."<sup>14</sup> When the ghost appears in Scene 4, "The co-presence of Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo is most judiciously contrived; for it renders the courage of Hamlet and his impetuous eloquence perfectly intelligible. THE KNOWLEDGE,—THE UNTHOUGHT OF CONSCIOUSNESS,—THE SENSATION,—OF HUMAN AUDITORS—OF FLESH AND BLOOD SYMPATHISTS—acts as a support and a stimulation *a tergo*, while the front of the mind, THE WHOLE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE SPEAKER, IS FILLED, YEA, ABSORBED, BY THE APPARITION. Add, too, that the apparition itself has by its previous appearances been brought nearer to a thing of this world. This ACCRESCENCE OF OBJECTIVITY in a ghost that yet retains all its ghostly attributes and FEARFUL SUBJECTIVITY, is truly wonderful."<sup>15</sup>

Thus Coleridge sometimes finds the perfect dramatic character or the highly dramatic experience to consist in the balance of extreme degrees of the great fundamental opposites. Frequently, however, the dramatic character is one in which one tendency is developed to the partial exclusion of the other. It is the dominance of the one trait that individualizes the character, and makes it emerge from the universal (where there is a just balance). As Coleridge says in comparing Shakespeare's characters with Chaucer's: "Shakspeare's characters are the representatives of the interior nature of humanity, IN WHICH SOME ELEMENT HAS BECOME SO PREDOMINANT AS TO DESTROY THE HEALTH OF THE MIND."<sup>16</sup>

In such instances there is a double application of the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites, the predominance of either one of some pair of opposites giving the individuality essential

<sup>13</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 155.

<sup>16</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 246.

to a union of another pair of opposites, the universal and the individual.

There may be a happy contrast between characters in whom the reciprocal traits are respectively stressed; in such a case by means of the contrast the balance is established, opposites are created, and, since they are part of one artistic unit, in a sense reconciled. Take, for example, Don Quixote and Sancho: "Don Quixote's leanness and featureliness are happy exponents of the excess of the formative or imaginative in him, contrasted with Sancho's plump rotundity, and recipiency of external impression."<sup>17</sup> Again, "Don Quixote grows at length to be a man out of his wits; his understanding is deranged; and hence without the least deviation from the truth of nature, without losing the least trait of personal individuality, he becomes a substantial living allegory, or PERSONIFICATION OF THE REASON AND THE MORAL SENSE, DIVESTED OF THE JUDGMENT AND THE UNDERSTANDING. Sancho is the converse. He is the COMMON SENSE WITHOUT REASON OR IMAGINATION; and Cervantes not only shows the excellence and power of reason in Don Quixote, but in both him and Sancho THE MISCHIEFS RESULTING FROM A SEVERANCE OF THE TWO MAIN CONSTITUENTS OF SOUND INTELLECT AND MORAL ACTION. PUT HIM AND HIS MASTER TOGETHER AND THEY FORM A PERFECT INTELLECT; BUT THEY ARE SEPARATED AND WITHOUT CEMENT; and hence each having a need of the other for its own completeness, each has at times a mastery over the other. For the common sense, although it may see the practical inapplicability of the dictates of the imagination or abstract reason, yet can not help submitting to them. These two characters possess the world, alternately and interchangeably the cheater and the cheated. To impersonate them, and to combine the permanent with the individual, is one of the greatest creations of genius, and has been achieved by Cervantes and Shakspeare, almost alone."<sup>18</sup>

But such contrast is by no means essential. The character need not be pitted against its opposite. The real dramatic conflict is not so much that between two opposites on the same level as it is that between the individual, representing the dominance of one tendency, and the universal, which, while it may be conceived as the reciprocal element, really involves the completed

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<sup>17</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 266.

<sup>18</sup> Works, Vol. IV, pp. 267-268.

balance. In Hamlet Coleridge discovers no such contrast as in Don Quixote, but the character of Hamlet admirably illustrates the lack of balance that individualizes: "I believe the character of Hamlet may be traced to Shakspeare's deep and accurate science in mental philosophy. . . . In order to understand him, it is essential that we should reflect on the constitution of our own minds. Man is distinguished from the brute animals in proportion as thought prevails over sense: BUT IN THE HEALTHY PROCESSES OF THE MIND, A BALANCE IS CONSTANTLY MAINTAINED BETWEEN THE IMPRESSIONS FROM OUTWARD OBJECTS AND THE INWARD OPERATIONS OF THE INTELLECT:—for if there be an overbalance in the contemplative faculty, man thereby becomes the creature of mere meditation, and loses his natural power of action. Now ONE OF SHAKSPEARE'S MODES OF CREATING CHARACTER IS, TO CONCEIVE ANY ONE INTELLECTUAL OR MORAL FACULTY IN MORBID EXCESS, and then to place himself, Shakspeare, thus mutilated or diseased, under given circumstances. In Hamlet he seems to have wished to exemplify the MORAL NECESSITY OF A DUE BALANCE BETWEEN OUR ATTENTION TO THE OBJECTS OF OUR SENSES, AND OUR MEDITATION ON THE WORKINGS OF OUR MINDS,—an *equilibrium* between THE REAL AND THE IMAGINARY WORLDS. In Hamlet this balance is disturbed; HIS THOUGHTS AND THE IMAGES OF HIS FANCY, ARE FAR MORE VIVID THAN HIS ACTUAL PERCEPTIONS, and his very perceptions, instantly passing through the *medium* of his contemplations, acquire, as they pass, a form and color not naturally their own. Hence we see a GREAT, AN ALMOST ENORMOUS, INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY, and a PROPORTIONATE AVERSION TO REAL ACTION, consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. This character Shakspeare places in circumstances, under which it is obliged to act on the spur of the moment: Hamlet is brave and careless of death; but he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve."<sup>19</sup>

Even here, however, nature asserts herself, it seems, to maintain some sort of balance, for Hamlet's mind is not simply constantly "throwing a mist over all common-place actualities," but also "giving substance to shadows." As in the case of Don Quixote, some substance there must be. Of Hamlet's first soliloquy he notes, "*This tædium vitæ* is a common oppression on minds cast in the Hamlet mould, and is caused by disproportion-

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<sup>19</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 145.

ate mental exertion, which necessitates exhaustion of bodily feeling. When there is a just coincidence of external and internal action, pleasure is always the result; but where the former is deficient, and the mind's appetency of the ideal is unchecked, realities will seem cold and unmoving. In such cases, passion combines itself with the indefinite alone. In this mood of his mind the relation of the appearance of his father's spirit in arms is made all at once to Hamlet."<sup>20</sup>

The abnormal predominance of the imagination appears again in the character of Lady Macbeth, though here it plays a different role. "Lady Macbeth, like all in Shakspeare, is a class individualized:—of high rank, left much alone, and feeding herself with day-dreams of ambition, she mistakes the courage of fantasy for the power of bearing the consequences of the realities of guilt. Hers is the mock fortitude of a mind deluded by ambition; she shames her husband with a superhuman audacity of fancy which she can not support, but sinks in the season of remorse, and dies in suicidal agony. Her speech:—

Come all you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, &c.,

is that of one who had habitually familiarized her imagination to dreadful conceptions and was trying to do so still more. Her invocations and requisitions are all the FALSE EFFORTS OF A MIND ACCUSTOMED ONLY HITHERTO TO THE SHADOWS OF THE IMAGINATION, VIVID ENOUGH TO THROW THE EVERY-DAY SUBSTANCES OF LIFE INTO SHADOW, BUT NEVER AS YET BROUGHT INTO DIRECT CONTACT WITH THEIR OWN CORRESPONDENT REALITIES."<sup>21</sup>

Iago's abnormality is his consciousness of superior intellect. He shows himself to be a passionless character, according to Coleridge, in his reply to Roderigo's question, "What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so fond, but it is not in my virtue to amend it." Iago replies: "Virtue? a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus, or thus." Coleridge's comment reads: "This speech comprises the PASSIONLESS CHARACTER OF IAGO. IT IS ALL WILL IN INTELLECT; and therefore he is here a bold partisan of a truth, but yet of a TRUTH CONVERTED INTO A FALSEHOOD BY THE

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<sup>20</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 152.

<sup>21</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 170.



ABSENCE OF ALL NECESSARY MODIFICATION CAUSED BY THE FRAIL NATURE OF MAN."<sup>22</sup>

In Richard II there are examples both of the really dramatic abnormality and of that which is merely "adventitious." The one sets off the other.

"There is scarcely anything in Shakspeare in its degree, more admirably drawn than York's character; his religious loyalty struggling with a deep grief and indignation at the king's follies; his adherence to his word and faith, once given in spite of all, even the most natural, feelings. You see in him the WEAKNESS OF OLD AGE, and the overwhelmingness of circumstances, FOR A TIME SURMOUNTING HIS SENSE OF DUTY—the junction of both exhibited in HIS BOLDNESS IN WORDS and FEEBLENESS IN IMMEDIATE ACT; and then again HIS EFFORT TO RETRIEVE HIMSELF IN ABSTRACT LOYALTY, even at the heavy price of the loss of his son. THIS SPECIES OF ACCIDENTAL AND ADVENTITIOUS WEAKNESS IS BROUGHT INTO PARALLEL WITH RICHARD'S CONTINUALLY INCREASING ENERGY OF THOUGHT, AND AS CONSTANTLY DIMINISHING POWER OF ACTING;— and thus it is Richard that breathes a harmony and a relation into all the characters of the play."<sup>23</sup>

Thus the dramatic character illustrates, to quote from Coleridge's definition of beauty, "not only the living balance, but likewise all the accompaniments that even by disturbing are necessary to the renewal and continuance of the balance."<sup>24</sup> This view of the dramatic character as individualized by the excess of one fundamental quality and a corresponding deficiency in its opposite, is quite in keeping with Coleridge's theory of the drama—tragedy especially. In tragedy there is a conflict between the individual will and fate, and there are suggestions of a reconciliation of the two: "In the drama, the WILL is exhibited as struggling with FATE,"—and further—"the deepest effect is produced, when the fate is represented as a higher and intelligent will, and the opposition of the individual as springing from a defect."<sup>25</sup> The conception of reconciliation is made explicit in Coleridge's lecture on the Greek drama: "Tragedy, indeed, carried the thoughts into the mythologic world, in order to raise the emotions, the fears, and the hopes, which convince the inmost heart that their final

<sup>22</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 180.

<sup>23</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 125.

<sup>24</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 371.

<sup>25</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 116.



cause is not to be discovered in the limits of mere mortal life, and force us into a presentiment, however dim, of a state in which these struggles of the inward free will with outward necessity, which form the true subject of the tragedian, shall be reconciled and solved."<sup>26</sup>

But Coleridge's use of opposition in the analysis of the dramatic character is not confined to such elemental philosophic antitheses as the Individual and the Universal, Reason and Emotion, the Ideal and the Real. In his analysis he speaks paradoxically of various qualities pertaining to the human soul, simultaneously affirming and denying their presence, or else affirming the coexistence of the quality and its opposite; thus he suggests a larger interpretation of the quality involved. This larger interpretation is in either case just that larger meaning which any term must acquire when it is reconciled with its opposite,—the logic of antithesis holds whether the opposition is that between two antithetical qualities or that between the presence and absence of a single quality. He seems perhaps to be punning, for he is using words in a double sense, but he is punning logically. He is suggesting a larger meaning of a term by showing up the contradiction that must be recognized if we take it in its narrow sense. Take, for example, the word "character." The smaller and the larger meanings are both obvious in the following notes. In his criticism of Hamlet, Coleridge writes: "Note Shakspeare's charm of composing the final character by the absence of characters, that is, marks and out-jottings."<sup>27</sup> Again, in his *Table Talk*: "'Most women have no character at all,' said Pope, and meant it for satire. Shakspeare, who knew man and woman much better, saw that it, in fact, was the perfection of women to be characterless."<sup>28</sup>

A most suggestive comment on the relativity of madness and sanity, suggesting larger meanings of both, is the note on Hamlet's madness. This, Coleridge finds, "is made to consist in the free utterance of all the thoughts that had passed through his mind before;—in fact, in telling home-truths."<sup>29</sup>

Several notes on Macbeth give evidence of the same method of analysis. In discussing the element of superstition in the play, he indicates by means of a paradox, the two possibilities of the

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<sup>26</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 159.

<sup>28</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 349.

<sup>29</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 162.

passion of hope, the one expansive, stimulating, thoroughly wholesome, the other sub-normal: "Superstition, of one sort or another, is natural to victorious generals; the instances are too notorious to need mentioning. There is so much of chance in warfare, and such vast events are connected with the acts of a single individual,—the representative, in truth, of the efforts of myriads, and yet to the public, and, doubtless, to his own feelings, the aggregate of all,—that the proper temperament for generating or receiving superstitious impressions is naturally produced. HOPE, THE MASTER ELEMENT OF A COMMANDING GENIUS, MEETING WITH AN ACTIVE AND COMBINING INTELLECT, AND AN IMAGINATION OF JUST THAT DEGREE OF VIVIDNESS WHICH DISQUIETS AND IMPELS THE SOUL TO TRY TO REALIZE ITS IMAGES, GREATLY INCREASES THE CREATIVE POWER OF THE MIND; and hence the images become a satisfying world of themselves, as is the case in every poet and original philosopher;—BUT HOPE FULLY GRATIFIED, AND YET THE ELEMENTARY BASIS OF THE PASSION REMAINING, BECOMES FEAR; and, indeed, the general, who must often feel, even though he may hide it from his own consciousness, how large a share chance had in his successes, may very naturally be irresolute in a new scene, where he knows that all will depend on his own act and election."<sup>30</sup>

Macbeth is characterized as "all-powerful without strength; he wishes the end, but is irresolute as to the means; conscience distinctly warns him, and he lulls it imperfectly."<sup>31</sup>

In the notes on Othello, there are some rather striking paradoxes. Of Iago's jealous denunciation of Cassio he writes: "In what follows, let the reader feel how by and through the glass of two passions, disappointed vanity and envy, THE VERY VICES of which he is complaining, are made to act upon him as if they were so many EXCELLENCES, and the more appropriately, because cunning is always admired and wished for by minds conscious of inward weakness;—but they act only by half, like music on an inattentive auditor, swelling the thoughts which prevent him from listening to it."<sup>32</sup> And of Othello's speech in the last scene, beginning,

"Speak of me as I am—  
     ... of one whose hand,  
 Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away  
 Richer than all his tribe,"

<sup>30</sup> Works, Vol. IV, pp. 165-166.

<sup>31</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 168.

<sup>32</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 178.

"Othello wishes to EXCUSE HIMSELF on the score of ignorance, and YET NOT TO EXCUSE HIMSELF,—to EXCUSE himself by ACCUSING. This struggle of feeling is freely conveyed in the word 'base,' which is applied to the rude Indian, not in his own character, but as the momentary representative of Othello's."<sup>33</sup>

"The motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity,"<sup>34</sup> exemplified in Iago's lines, "I hate the Moor," etc., gives an interpretation of the term motive that suggests some aspects of present-day criminology. As Coleridge elsewhere notes of Macbeth, the real germ lies back of the immediate or assumed cause.<sup>35</sup> The idea is elaborated a little more in a jotting in the *Anima Poetae*. Coleridge notes that in trying to discover reasons for suicide we are trying to "fish out some *motive* for an act which proceeded from a *motive-making* impulse."<sup>36</sup>

Finally in the notes on King Lear, Coleridge remarks as one of the malign influences on Edmund, "the gnawing conviction that every show of respect is an effort of courtesy, which recalls, while it represses, a contrary feeling."<sup>37</sup>

The application of the principle in the analysis of dramatic character is without doubt highly complex and its significance lies very largely in the concrete instances of its application. But there are one or two fairly definite suggestions of theory worth noting. In the first place, Coleridge's analysis of the art product in terms of logical opposites, even though these opposites are generalizations or abstractions, seems, to some extent, to reflect directly the structural reality of the product. The drama does, it would seem, by representing extremes, interpret life as an actual conflict of just those elements that we find opposed in the abstractions of a logical antithesis. In the second place, the frequency with which Coleridge uses verbal paradoxes in his criticism, indicating dual meanings, at least suggests the peculiar way in which art brings to consciousness the sense of something more than is on the surface, and further indicates that somehow the

<sup>33</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 184.

<sup>34</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 181.

<sup>35</sup> When Macbeth anticipates Banquo's statement of the prophecy, interrupting with, "And thane of Cawdor too: went it not so?" Coleridge notes: "So surely is the guilt in its germ anterior to the supposed cause, and immediate temptation!" Works, Vol. IV, p. 168.

<sup>36</sup> A. P., p. 196.

<sup>37</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 136.

interaction between the accepted surface reality and this deeper reality, gives the dramatic element, that is, issues in the external conflict.<sup>38</sup>

## 2. PROBLEM OF TRAGI-COMEDY

In his justification of Shakespeare's "romantic" art Coleridge naturally found it necessary to consider rather carefully the intermixture of comedy and tragedy. Both from the philosophical and from the psychological standpoint he finds that the two actually have something in common. The separative spirit of the Greek arts is exemplified, he notes, in the opposition of their comedy to their tragedy. "But," he continues, "as the immediate struggle of contraries supposes an arena common to both, so both were alike ideal; that is, the comedy of Aristophanes rose to as great a distance above the ludicrous of real life, as the tragedy of Sophocles above its tragic events and passions."<sup>39</sup> The sources of the tragic and the comic are to a degree similar; hence we find in nature alternations of the two. Coleridge works the matter out in some detail in explaining the semi-falsity of Hamlet's madness: "The truth is, that after the mind has been stretched beyond its usual pitch and tone, it must either sink into exhaustion and inanity, or seek relief by change. It is thus well known, that persons conversant in deeds of cruelty contrive escape from conscience by connecting something of the ludicrous with them, and by inventing grotesque terms and a certain technical phraseology to disguise the horror of their practices. Indeed, paradoxical as it may appear, the terrible by a law of the human mind always touches on the verge of the ludicrous. Both arise from the perception of something out of the common order of things—something, in fact, out of its place; and if from this we can abstract danger, the uncommonness will alone remain, and the sense of the ridiculous be excited. The close alliance of these opposites—they are not contraries—appears from the circumstance, that laughter is equally the expression of extreme anguish and horror as of joy: as there are tears of sorrow and tears of joy, so is there a laugh of terror and a laugh of merri-

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<sup>38</sup> That is, art expresses in a more evident way than ordinary life the logic of antithesis. I grant that in this theorizing I am reading something between the lines of Coleridge's criticism, but it is something that I cannot fail to find there when considering the aesthetic implications of antithesis as suggested by Professor Lloyd.

<sup>39</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 23.

ment. These complex causes will naturally have produced in Hamlet the disposition to escape from his own feelings of the overwhelming and supernatural by a wild transition to the ludicrous—a sort of cunning bravado, bordering on the flights of delirium. For you may, perhaps, observe that Hamlet's wildness is but half false; he plays that subtle trick of pretending to act only when he is very near really being what he acts."<sup>40</sup>

The fusion of the two is frequently justified. It may be justified by the psychological effect produced on the audience by the contrast, or again by a real, dramatic interaction between the tragic and comic characters. The effect of contrast is noted in the following remark: "Shakspeare found the infant stage demanding an intermixture of ludicrous character as imperiously as that of Greece did the chorus, and high language accordant. And there are many advantages in this;—a greater assimilation to nature, a greater scope of power, more truths, and more feelings;—the effects of contrast, as in *Lear* and the Fool; and especially this, that the true language of passion becomes sufficiently elevated by your having previously heard, in the same piece, the lighter conversation of men under no strong emotion."<sup>41</sup>

In another passage *King Lear* is used to illustrate the actual effect produced upon the tragic character by the comic: "Shakspeare's comic are continually reacting upon his tragic characters. *Lear*, wandering amidst the tempest, has all his feelings of distress increased by the overflowings of the wild wit of the Fool . . . Thus even his comic humor tends to the development of tragic passion."<sup>42</sup>

There is a very keen comment on the relation of the two in the notes on *Romeo and Juliet*. "With his accustomed judgment, Shakspeare has begun by placing before us a lively picture of all the impulses of the play; and, as nature ever presents two sides, one for *Heraclitus* and one for *Democritus*, he has by way of prelude, shown the laughable absurdity of the evil by the contagion of it reaching the servants, who have so little to do with it, but who are under the necessity of letting the superfluity of sensorial power fly off through the escape-valve of wit-combats, and of quarreling with weapons of sharper edge, all in humble imitation of their masters. Yet there is a sort of unhired

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<sup>40</sup> Works, Vol. IV, pp. 155-156.

<sup>41</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 38.

<sup>42</sup> Works, Vol. IV, pp. 64-65.



fidelity, an *ourishness* about all this that makes it rest pleasant on one's feelings."<sup>43</sup>

The fusion may be of one sort or another, but it must be a real fusion. "In Beaumont and Fletcher's tragedies," Coleridge notes, "the comic scenes are rarely so interspersed amidst the tragic as to produce a unity of the tragic on the whole, without which the intermixture is a fault. In Shakspeare, this is always managed with transcendent skill. The Fool in Lear contributes in a very sensible manner to the tragic wildness of the whole drama."<sup>44</sup> Thus the mixture of tragedy and comedy is justified by Coleridge not simply on the grounds of an essential similarity in their natures, but also psychologically or functionally. It is to be noted that here the opposites are not left as metaphysical abstractions; the principle becomes a means of structural analysis.

### 3. THEORY OF IMITATION

The proper method of interpreting the classical doctrine of the imitation of nature had long been a bone of contention among critics, and it is not to be wondered at that the theory of imitation should occupy a considerable place in Coleridge's criticism. It is implicit in all his statements concerning man and nature, already touched upon, and it is also developed in a way that brings it down, as will appear, to the reconciliation of the two opposites, likeness and difference.<sup>45</sup>

In his discussion of dramatic realism Coleridge's main tenet seems to be that stage illusion should consist in what he terms a negative rather than a positive judgment of reality: "The true stage-illusion . . . consists—not in the mind's judging it to be a forest, but, in its remission of the judgment that it is not a forest. And this subject of stage-illusion is so important, and so many practical errors and false criticisms may arise, and indeed have arisen, either from reasoning on it as actual delusion (the strange notion, on which the French critics built up their theory, and on which the French poets justify the construction of their tragedies), or from denying it altogether (which seems the end of Dr. Johnson's reasoning, and which, as extremes meet,

<sup>43</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 111.

<sup>44</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 464.

<sup>45</sup> De Quincey's verdict on one instance of Coleridge's use of this formula has already been quoted. (See above, Chapter III.)



would lead to the very same consequences, by excluding whatever would not be judged probable by us in our coolest state of feelings, with all our faculties in even balance), that these few remarks will, I hope, be pardoned, if they should serve either to explain or to illustrate the point. For not only are we never absolutely deluded—or anything like it, but the attempt to cause the highest delusion possible to beings in their senses sitting in a theatre, is a gross fault, incident only to low minds, which, feeling that they cannot affect the heart or head permanently, endeavor to call forth the momentary affections.”<sup>47</sup>

A copy of the external (that is, likeness without difference) which might result in positive illusion, or delusion, will never result in art: “The artist must imitate that which is within the thing, . . . for so only can he hope to produce any work truly natural in the object and truly human in the effect.”<sup>48</sup> The illusion may be produced in spite of great deviations from the facts, in spite of gross improbabilities, provided the author can carry his audience with him by working in accordance with psychological laws and giving to the drama the inner consistency of imaginative fusion.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, it is essential that there be difference as well as likeness. “It is a poor compliment to pay to a painter

<sup>46</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 37. Cf. p. 73.

<sup>47</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 302.

<sup>48</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 333.

<sup>49</sup> “Each part should be proportionate, though the whole may be perhaps impossible. At all events, it should be compatible with sound sense and logic in the mind of the poet himself. . . . the consciousness of the poet’s mind must be diffused over that of the reader or spectator; but he himself, according to his genius, elevates us, and by being always in keeping, prevents us from perceiving any strangeness, though we feel great exultation.” Works, Vol. IV, pp. 42-43.

“Of all intellectual power, that of superiority to the fear of the invisible world is the most dazzling. Its influence is abundantly proved by the one circumstance, that it can bribe us into a voluntary submission of our better knowledge, into suspension of all our judgment derived from constant experience, and enable us to peruse with the liveliest interest the wildest tales of ghosts, wizards, genii, and secret talismans. On this propensity, so deeply rooted in our nature, a specific *dramatic* probability may be raised by a true poet, if the whole of his work be in harmony; a *dramatic* probability, sufficient for dramatic pleasure, even when the component characters and incidents border on impossibility. The poet does not require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream; and this too with our eyes open, and with our judgment *perdue* behind the curtain, ready to awaken us at the first motion of our will; and meantime, only not to *disbelieve*.” (Works, Vol. III, p. 564.)

to tell him that his figure stands out of the canvass, or that you start at the likeness of the portrait."<sup>50</sup> There must be a union of the two opposites: "Imitation, as opposed to copying, consists either in the interfusion of the same throughout the radically different, or of the different throughout a base radically the same."<sup>51</sup> "Imitation is the mesothesis of Likeness and Difference. The difference is as essential to it as the likeness; for without the difference, it would be Copy or fac-simile."<sup>52</sup>

Coleridge uses this principle in explaining symbols: "Hard to express that sense of the analogy or likeness of a thing which enables a symbol to represent it so that we think of the thing itself, yet knowing that the thing is not present to us. Surely on this universal fact of words and images depends, by more or less mediations, the imitation, instead of the *copy* which is illustrated, in very nature Shaksperianised—that Proteus essence that could assume the very form, but yet known and felt not to be the thing by that difference of the substance which made every atom of the form another thing, that likeness not identity—an exact web, every line of direction miraculously the same, but the one worsted, the other silk."<sup>53</sup>

It is the interfusion of difference in the likeness that partially accounts for the pleasure resulting from Wordsworth's portrayal of rustic life. "The second [exciting cause] is the apparent naturalness of the representation, as raised, and qualified by an imperceptible interfusion of the author's own knowledge and talent, which infusion does, indeed, constitute it an imitation as distinguished from a mere copy."<sup>54</sup>

It is the larger interpretation of imitation inherent in the paradoxical conception, that makes Coleridge tolerant in his judgment of the opera: "All the objections to the opera are equally applicable to tragedy and comedy without music, and all proceed on the false principle that theatrical representations are *copies* of nature, whereas they are imitations."<sup>55</sup>

The consciousness that both likeness to nature and unlikeness are necessary, gives rise to some interesting concrete comments on Shakespeare's plays. In the notes on Richard II, Coleridge

<sup>50</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 470.

<sup>51</sup> Works, Vol. III, p. 421.

<sup>52</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 468.

<sup>53</sup> A. P., p. 87.

<sup>54</sup> Works, Vol. III, p. 396.

<sup>55</sup> A. P., p. 82.

justifies rhyme, which had long been criticized as unnatural, by calling attention to the fact "that the speakers are historical, known, and so far formal, characters, and their reality is already a fact."<sup>56</sup> And again he notes "the skill and judgment of our poet in giving reality and individual life, by the introduction of accidents in his historic plays, and thereby making them dramas, and not histories."<sup>57</sup> Of King Lear he writes: "It may here be worthy of notice, that Lear is the only serious performance of Shakspeare, the interest and situations of which are derived from the assumption of a gross improbability; whereas Beaumont and Fletcher's tragedies are, almost all of them, founded on some out of the way accident or exception to the general experience of mankind. But observe the matchless judgment of our Shakspeare. First, improbable as the conduct of Lear is in the first scene, yet it was an old story rooted in the popular faith,—a thing taken for granted already, and consequently without any of the effect of improbability. Secondly, it is merely the canvass for the characters and passions,—a mere occasion for,—and not, in the manner of Beaumont and Fletcher, perpetually recurring as the cause, and *sine qua non*, of,—the incidents and emotion."<sup>58</sup>

#### 4. PROBLEM OF UNITY

The synthesis of unity and variety issues, in Coleridge's concrete applications of the principle, in the conception of organic unity. If the objective expression is the result of a "growth from within," that is, if the formal is the expression of the vital, then the unity of the resultant work will be the unity of fusion rather than combination, there will be intricate interrelations, even "evolution" of thought. Of Jonson Coleridge notes that "in all his works, in verse or prose, there is an extraordinary opulence of thought; but it is the product of an amassing power in the author, and not of a growth from within."<sup>59</sup> Again, "Shakspeare's intellectual action is wholly unlike that of Ben Jonson or Beaumont and Fletcher. The latter see the totality of a sentence or passage, and then project it entire. Shakspeare goes on creating, and evolving, B. out of A., and C. out of B., and so on, just as a serpent moves, which makes a fulcrum of its own body,

<sup>56</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 122.

<sup>57</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 128.

<sup>58</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 134.

<sup>59</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 254.

and seems forever twisting and untwisting its own strength."<sup>60</sup> "In Shakspeare one sentence begets the next naturally; the meaning is all inwoven. He goes on kindling like a meteor through the dark atmosphere; yet, when the creation in its outline is once perfect, then he seems to rest from his labor, and to smile upon his work, and tell himself that it is very good. You see many scenes and parts of scenes which are simply Shakspeare's disporting himself in joyous triumph and vigorous fun after a great achievement of his highest genius."<sup>61</sup>

It is evident from these quotations that the reconciliation of unity and variety involved the reconciliation of many other fundamental pairs of opposites. When the objective unity is conceived as the result of a growth from within it means the reconciliation of the subjective and objective, man and nature, the formal and the vital; and in the last quoted comment on Shakespeare there is clearly implied the union of rest and motion. In certain other instances the reconciliation is between the past and the future: in the notes on *Hamlet* Coleridge remarks that Shakespeare's opening scenes often "place before us at one glance both the past and the future in some effect, which implies the continuance and full agency of its cause."<sup>62</sup> The "anticipations" evident in the character of Richard "illustrate his care to connect the past and future, and unify them with the present by forecast and reminiscence."<sup>63</sup>

I think we may say of Coleridge's applications of the principle to these specific problems that they are of theoretical as well as of interpretative significance. The metaphysical conceptions that were always at least in the background of his consciousness, served to sharpen his critical insight, and in so doing justified their existence; but the combination of the metaphysical theory and the concrete observations resulted in a criticism that does more than deepen the layman's appreciation of the works criticised. In Coleridge's analyses that are based upon the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites, there are many suggestions for the theorist. The extent to which Coleridge deserves credit for originality in these suggestions is not my problem. The theorist may seek them elsewhere if he will; in the meanwhile, they are here—and quantities of them—and in a most alluring form.

<sup>60</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 503.

<sup>61</sup> Works, Vol. VI, p. 438.

<sup>62</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 147.

<sup>63</sup> Works, Vol. IV, p. 121.

## CONCLUSION

Coleridge's use of the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites is in a sense out of date. His Opposites are, in the main, metaphysical concepts rather than mechanical forces or other scientifically real elements. And as with dualism in general, so with such a principle as this,—the present day is rather more concerned with the countless actual oppositions and reconciliations disclosed by a scientific analysis of life than with the metaphysical formulae that seem to symbolize them. Of the two forms of the principle, the mechanical and the metaphysical, considered in the introduction to this paper, the mechanical is distinctly more "modern," construing the world, as it does, according to the formula Action = Reaction, defining Art in the terms of psychological action and reaction, bringing out in the concrete work of art the actual structural oppositions.

And yet, admirably as the mechanical form serves its purpose, it does so necessarily at the cost of certain elements of value found in the metaphysical form. It is difficult to express even relatively ultimate values in scientific and mechanical terms, for the mechanical construction of the universe is avowedly a means, not an end,<sup>1</sup> and a means to an infinite number of individual ends that cannot be summed up in any general mechanical formula. It follows that in the mechanical form of antithesis there can be little suggestion of ultimate values. The terms are indifferent characterless units, that have even lost their distinguishing names. The oppositions and reconciliations of art, according to this view, are not those of Man and Nature, the Vital and the Formal, the Individual and the Universal (all significant concepts), but those of forces or structural elements, conceived as identical units opposed only spatially. Even in De Quincey's formula cited above—"the electrical kindling of life between two minds"—the minds are any two minds, that is, scientific units. It is true that in all antithesis there is balance and indifference. The terms of even the metaphysical antithesis are losing their traditional values. But they retain at least their individualizing

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<sup>1</sup> See the closing paragraphs of the Introduction.



names, and these serve to express the new values being acquired; whereas in any mechanical balance of forces the value must be taken on faith—it is not expressed. It is evident then that the more modern form of the principle cannot give the immediate suggestion of values, the sense of quality, of something ultimate, that characterizes the metaphysical form.

It will be necessary, of course, to “reconcile” the two forms by using each as a criticism of the other. But it has not been my purpose in this paper to carry the process of reconciliation very far; my attempt has been simply to define and analyze Coleridge’s uses of the principle and in so doing indicate to some slight extent the significance of even the out-of-date metaphysical antithesis.

As appeared when the matter was viewed from the logical standpoint, the principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites indicates an interest in art as art that characterized Coleridge’s time. Moreover, the use of the principle, especially in its metaphysical form, was thoroughly characteristic of Coleridge; not simply the reconciliation, but also the positing of the opposites, was with him what might be called a “constitutional” habit, thoroughly in keeping with the generally recognized nature of his philosophical thinking. In his unsystematic applications of the principle to life and to art Coleridge used it, on the one hand, as a general formula for all experience, taking real delight in the mere discovery of its applicability, and on the other hand, as a norm, as a means of indicating the beauty and the wholesomeness of the ideal, and rather incidentally of implying the defectiveness of much of the actual. With its immediate suggestions of ultimate values and with its admirable adaptation to corrective uses it served excellently as a standard. Coleridge’s use of the principle in aesthetic theory and literary criticism sometimes showed, as we should expect, confusion between the metaphysical or logical and the psychological or scientific standpoint, but ordinarily, whichever the standpoint, it found expression in much valuable criticism. It issued, especially in his Shakespeare criticism, in suggestive analyses of dramatic character and situation and in many hints as to the essential nature of the dramatic element. Moreover, in accordance with the law of dual meanings involved in all antithesis it served to indicate the larger and in general psychologically sound interpretations of the fundamental aesthetic concepts and of such critical doctrines as those of tragedy and comedy, imitation, and unity.



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